DEMAND-SIDE EXPERIENCES OF EMPLOYERS WHO WORK WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

A Record of Study Proposal

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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May 2021

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

Employment fosters social and emotional development in addition to providing greater financial independence. This action research study aimed to address a problem of practice for a semi-rural district in Southwest Washington State to improve transition programming for students receiving special education services. In rural and semi-rural areas, young adults who have been entitled to accommodations and modifications while attending public schools find themselves seeking employment in their communities, where businesses are likely to be exempt from the comprehensive protection provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Employers' attitudes contribute to employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities As an exploratory study, the attitudes and perspectives of rural small business owners regarding the employment of individuals with disabilities were examined utilizing Grounded Theory, the Constant Comparative Method, and the Gioia Method. The qualitative data collected and analyzed in this study suggests that factors impacting the attitudes of employers in hiring individuals with disabilities includes both supervisory knowledge, expertise, and experience as well as company attributes and opportunities. The data in this study also suggest that programmatic approaches that impact the attitudes of employers in hiring individuals with disabilities include: fostering of beliefs about the employability of individuals with disabilities; an internship experience that demonstrates the value the individual brings to the business; program staff who provide information, strategies, and resources to prepare employers to hire the intern upon completion of an unpaid internship; and temporary support for the employee with disabilities during the initial training process. Results of this study impacts the problem of practice for the semi-rural district in Southwest Washington State, adding to the body of knowledge in demand-side factors of employment for individuals with disabilities for this community.

DEDICATION

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."--Benjamin Franklin

For Sydney

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF THE ACTION

Demand-side employment approaches focus on employer-based strategies and interventions that affect how employers respond to the needs of employees with disabilities in the work environment (Delman et al., 2017; Lindsay et al., 2018). The organizational culture, beliefs regarding the cost of accommodations, and the attitudes of staff and management represent common demand-side barriers to employment (Kocman et al., 2017). Ameri et al (2018) infer that discriminatory hiring practices impact the employment of individuals with disabilities, when the employer has fewer than 15 employees. The employment dynamics for individuals with disabilities involves not only the skills and experience of the individuals with disabilities, but also the experiences and expectations of employers (Ju et al., 2014; Bumble et al., 2017; McDonnell et al., 2015; Stone and Colella, 1996).

This exploratory study examines the attitudes and perspectives of rural small business owners regarding the employment of individuals with disabilities. The data gathered were the source to identify strategies and programmatic approaches that can be used by the local school district's transition program to positively impact the employment opportunities of young adults with disabilities within the same rural community as the employers participating in the study. Individuals with disabilities are not participants in this study; however, they are direct beneficiaries of the findings of this study.

National Context

Initially federal regulations showed promise, but legislation has failed to impact the unemployment rate of people with disabilities in a significant way (Wehman et al., 2018). The motivations of an individual with a disability to seek employment are no different than the motivations of an individual without a disability (Wehman et al., 2018), in that they seek

financial independence (Kocman, 2017), greater autonomy (Sosnowy, 2018), and social interaction (Wehman et al., 2018). The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) defines a disability as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities" of an individual (§12102). The reauthorization in 2008 of the ADA clarified the definition of major life activities, and the two primary categories can be found in Table 1 (§12102). The employment rate of individuals with disabilities has demonstrated modest increases since the passing of several federal regulations aimed at addressing the high unemployment rate of this population (Blanck, 1995; Legnick-Hall et al., 2008; Unger, 2002). Barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities include: discriminatory practices and policies (Erickson et al., 2014), interagency collaboration (Test & Fowler, 2018), fear of losing disability benefits (Delman et al., 2017), and employers' lack of inclusionary practices (Erickson et al., 2014). The passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) were meant to address the obstacles to employment for individuals with disabilities. However, the unemployment rate of individuals with disabilities is 8%, while the unemployment rate of workers without disabilities was recently at 3.7% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). In 2018, across all age groups and levels of education, 8 out of every 10 individuals with a disability "were more likely to be out of the labor force than those with no disability" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019, p.1) .

Table 1
Major Life Activities

In general	caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working.
Major bodily functions	the operation of a major bodily function, including but not limited to, functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions.

Note: from the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act, 42 USCA § 12101(2008). *https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/adaaa.cfm*

Role of Public Education

Federal legislation regarding special education services within public schools has nearly a half century of history. An inclusive focus on educating individuals with disabilities began in 1975 with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHC), which guaranteed students with disabilities "a free, appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs" for students ages 3-21. In 1990, EAHC was reauthorized, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and outlines parental involvement in the development of a student's Individual Education Plan (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, n.d.). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) in 2004 reauthorized the mandates of IDEA and required early interventions for students not yet eligible for special education services, greater accountability and improved outcomes for students receiving special education services, and more rigorous standards for educators who teach special education students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020) The 2015 reauthorization of IDEA through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), also a reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, aligned the definitions within IDEA to those

within ESSA and revised alternative assessment requirements (National Center for Learning Disabilities, n.d.). For the purposes of this study, IDEA refers to the original legislation and is inclusive of the IDEIA of 2004 as well as revisions made through ESSA in 2015.

Transition services have existed within IDEA since the passing of the 1990 reauthorization. Each legislative change has gradually shifted the directive from a process model to a result-driven model of providing special education programming and related services (Gaumer et al., 2014). Each reauthorization of IDEA placed more direct emphasis on transition services and post-secondary outcomes.

IDEA compliance measures exist at the individual, district, and state level. At the individual level, students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) must also have a transition plan developed within the IEP, prior to the student's 16th birthday and then every year after to establish post-secondary goals and align secondary coursework with those goals (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2015; Johnson, 2008;). In the State of Washington, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) receives district performance data gathered from student IEPs and data from former students, those who aged out of special education services, graduated, or dropped out of school (Washington Administrative Code, 2018). OSPI reviews the data to determine if each district "meets the requirements and purposes of Part B of the Act [IDEA]" and if assistance or intervention is needed for the district in "implementing the requirements of Part B of the Act [IDEA]" (Washington Administrative Code, §392-172A-07012, 2018). In addition to IEP requirements, IDEA mandates that each state develop a State Performance Plan (SPP) in which the state self-reports compliance on the 20 indicators within Part B of IDEA, see Appendix A for the IDEA Part B Indicators. The State of Washington SPP report is based on the district data and determinations, and an Annual Performance Report (APR)

outlining measures to address passing rates on statewide assessments, graduation rates, and dropout rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Each of the Part B indicators within IDEA stipulates the support of students as they mature. Indicator B-13 requires that states document use of an assessment to determine appropriate measurable post-secondary goals supported with a course of study that enables the student to meet their post-secondary goals (Individuals with Disabilities Act, §1416, 1990). This indicator prompts school district case managers and other IEP team members to develop a transition plan within a student's IEP. Indicator B-14 requires the reporting of "the percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs at the time they left school", and were enrolled in higher education, enrolled in some other post-secondary training, or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, §1416, 2004). This indicator most directly aims to measure the goals of IDEA requiring that students attain a knowledge base that will allow "equality of opportunity, full participation [in society], independent living, and economic self-sufficiency" (U.S. Department of Education, 2019, pg.1).

The state of Washington has fallen short of the goals and expectations of IDEA (VanderPloeg, 2019). The most recent report by the U.S. Department of Education (2019) reiterated that compliance to IDEA is determined using four categorical designations (Meets, Needs Assistance, Needs Intervention, and Needs substantial Intervention). The state of Washington earned the designation of "Needs Assistance (two or more consecutive years)" (p. 3). This designation requires that the state of Washington seek technical assistance from an approved source and outline action steps derived from the technical assistance received in reporting the state's next SPP and APR, for fiscal year 2018 (VanderPloeg, 2019). Fiscal year

2017 data for Washington state indicates that since the baseline of 83.7% compliance to Indicator 13 established in 2009, the state has increased compliance to 95.22% (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Baseline for Indicator 14 was 66.93% of former students enrolled in higher education, post-secondary training, or competitive employment within one year of leaving high school, and the State of Washington met the SPP-APR plan target for this indicator in 2016 with 72.21% of former students enrolled in post-secondary education, training or employment (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The Center for Change in Transition Services (2019) reports that 27.8% of former students reported no engagement in post-secondary education, training, or employment during both the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years (p. 14). In a study of post-secondary outcomes for students receiving special education services in Washington state, Johnson (2008) suggested that "youth from rural and semi-rural settings were unengaged [in post-secondary education, training, or employment] more often than youth from urban areas" (p. 85).

The comprehensive structure provided by governmental policies and guidelines while a student is in the public education setting change significantly once a student leaves secondary education (Anderson et al., 2018). Once young adults with disabilities move into the competitive workforce, federal guidelines fall under the dictates of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the subsequent reauthorization and amendments. Hernandez et al. (2000) assert that "the ADA is the most comprehensive civil rights law protecting individuals with disabilities in employment settings" (p. 1). Subchapter one of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) outlines the employment-related provisions required by all employers who are not "a corporation wholly owned by the government or an Indian tribe" and employ more than 15 employees (§12111). The law requires employers to provide "reasonable accommodations"

(Americans with Disabilities Act, § 12112, 1990). It prohibits discriminatory practices based on the existence of a disability as related to "job application procedures, the hiring, advancement, or discharge of employees, employee compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment" (Americans with Disabilities Act, § 12112, 1990). The full provisions of ADA do not demand compliance from businesses that employ fewer than 15 employees.

In rural and semi-rural areas, young adults who have been entitled to accommodations and modifications while attending public schools find themselves seeking employment in their communities, where businesses are likely to be exempt from the comprehensive protection provided by the ADA. In Washington state, small businesses with fewer than 20 employees employ approximately 500,000 state residents and experienced the largest gain in net jobs (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2019). In rural counties, small business account for 47 to 80 percent of employment (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2018). Individuals with disabilities living in rural areas report additional barriers to employment, which include: transportation, the variety of employment opportunities, access to post secondary educational opportunities, availability of services, multiple responsibilities for personnel, and culture of inclusivity (Test & Fowler, 2018).

While there is no explicit legal requirement, Indicator B-14 of IDEA (1990) prompts the need for school programs to not only serve students with disabilities but to also support the education of local business owners and employers. The education of students to prepare for competitive employment and the education of local businesses to hire and retain individuals with disabilities can be accomplished simultaneously. Collaborative partnerships, between school programs and local businesses, create direct experiences for employers to work alongside young adults with disabilities while also benefiting from the support of school staff who work with the

young adults. These school-community partnerships could make voluntary compliance to the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) possible.

A direct approach, in which employers have experiential knowledge of employees with disabilities, is required to address the impact of employer attitudes toward hiring individuals with disabilities. Employer attitudes and workplace discrimination play an instrumental role in the employment rates of individuals with disabilities (Blanck, 1995; Delman et al., 2017; Ju et al., 2011; Kocman et al., 2017; Legnick-Hall et al., 2008; Lyth, 1973; Stone & Colella, 1996; Unger 2002). Thornicroft et al. (2007) suggested the assessment of actual hiring behavior rather than attitudes and perceptions that often have contextual and social implications. Kosyluk et al (2014) assessed the relationship between previous and future hiring decisions and found that employer attitude and perception of disabilities was a mediating factor in future hiring of individuals with disabilities. Stone and Colella (1996) include the "Attributes of Observers" (coworkers and supervisors) as a component of their theoretical model (p. 355). This component of the model considers the stereotypes that the observer may use to infer the "traits, abilities, and personality characteristics" of an individual with disabilities (p. 356).

Advocates are needed to promote and support the employment of individuals with disabilities. An advocate may be an educator, a job coach, a family member, or a vocational rehabilitation counselor (Muller & VanGilder, 2014; Raynor et al., 2018) who can approach employers in a cooperative and educational manner that guides the employer in developing a more inclusive workplace culture (Lindsay et al., 2018). Luecking (2011) suggested that advocates gain understanding of employers' concerns surrounding production and business capital rather than appeals to view individuals with disabilities as an untapped applicant pool. Legnick-Hall et al. (2008) and Bezyak et al. (2018) support Luecking's demand-side

employment model for individuals with disabilities through employer education and community supports for both individuals with disabilities and the employers who are hiring them. The educational aspect of this model aims to address common myths or misconceptions about hiring individuals with disabilities. Kaye et al. (2011) and Kosyluk et al (2014) suggest that employers' experiences and first-hand observations of people with disabilities in the workplace serve as an effective means to dispel many of the common myths surrounding the hiring of individuals with disabilities. Through community supports, employers gain tools to assist in navigating the governmental resources individuals with disabilities may bring to the workplace, as well as create a culture of inclusivity that extends to employees without disabilities, who may become disabled (Kocman et al., 2017).

Situational Context

Walls school district is located in Southwest Washington State in a semi-rural county. The district has one high school that serves approximately 1000 students, 13.9% of which receive special education services (Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction, n.d.). The district, as a whole, consistently has a higher percentage of students receiving special education services than the state average (S. Jones, Personal Communication, November 1, 2019). A team of 8 special education teachers and more than 20 paraeducators provide special education services and supports at the high school. Students receive special education and related services through a variety of settings, which include support through accommodations in the general education setting as well as self-contained classrooms with extensive accommodations and modified instruction. Community-based instruction is not part of the current special education programming for high school students receiving services.

The high school also houses the transition program that continues services for those students who have completed four years of high school and graduation requirements, but opt to continue working toward their IEP goals. Students participating in the transition program have a wide range of disabilities that include physical impairments, intellectual disorders, learning disabilities, sensory processing disorders, and neurological disorders. Transition program participants can remain enrolled through the school year in which they turn 21 years of age. There are nine students enrolled in the transition program for the 2019-2020 school year. The transition program provides classroom instruction in the areas of social skills, independent living skills, financial literacy, employment skills, and basic keyboarding and computer skills. Students who participate in the transition program are active within the local community through weekly volunteer activities and unpaid internships with local businesses.

The Problem

The Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI) collects data from school districts in Washington and determines their level of compliance with the 20 indicators of IDEA. OSPI then uses the same categorical designations as IDEA (Meets, Needs Assistance, Needs Intervention, and Needs Substantial Intervention) to determine the level of compliance for districts. The school district has earned the determination of "Needs Intervention" to meet the part B indicators of IDEA, based on data for the 2017-2018 school year (Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction, 2018). The school district's quality of student data and student outcomes for Indicator B-14 was the primary factor in the designation of "Needs Intervention" (W. Anderson, Personal Communication, November 25, 2019).

Relevant History of the Problem

Data collected for the 2017-2018 school year was based on information gathered

from former students during the 2016-2017 school year. The administrative assistant for the district's Special Education Department contacted students or their guardians by phone during the fall of 2017. Contact information for students was not a challenge, as many of the students remained in the community with the same phone numbers as when they attended school (W. Anderson, Personal Communication, November 25, 2019). The majority of students who responded to the school district's phone call reported that they were not enrolled in higher education, vocational or trades school, or competitively employed; two former students said that they were competitively employed (S. Jones, Personal Communication, November 1, 2019). Guardians who responded to the school district's phone call were frequently displeased with the outcomes their students had experienced since leaving services with the school district (W. Anderson, Personal Communication, November 25, 2019).

The 2017-2018 academic year brought substantive changes to the Walls School District. Students in the district receive transition services aligned with their transition plans, post-secondary goals, and post-secondary employment outcomes. Case managers for high school students incorporate exploratory activities in transition planning that include post-secondary training with local trade schools, job corps, and community college certificate programs. Students within the adult transition program develop resumes and cover letters, as well as participate in mock interviews with community businesses. Furthermore, students who participate in the adult transition program are routinely placed in at least two unpaid internships each school year to gain employment skills in an authentic environment and to explore individual career interests.

These programmatic adjustments have positively impacted the district's compliance to Indicator B-13 and show promise of improvement for Indicator B-14. Data collected by the

transition program show that the number of former students who are employed at least part-time has increased with each subsequent school year (S. Jones, Personal Communication, November 25, 2019). However, community partnerships and building community capacity to hire and retain individuals with disabilities in this area remains a relative weakness to improving the outcomes for students with disabilities. In the last two years, the community partnerships with the district transition program has more than tripled; however, the variety of industries represented in these partnerships is limited to food service, hotel hospitality, and janitorial. The city's tourism website (n.d.) lists 34 businesses within the community that provide lodging, food service, healthcare, and consumer goods. Approximately a dozen more companies exist within the city that are absent from the website's list, and they are within the manufacturing, retail service, and health care industries. Businesses in the community directly impact employment opportunities for all residents, including those living with a disability.

***Significance of the problem*.**

This problem of practice has significance to both the school district's continued autonomy within state and federal programming, as well the potential quality of life and financial independence of students in the school district. The state of Washington outlined incremental supports for those districts that continue to struggle with compliance with the indicators of IDEA. Consequences for non-compliance or inadequate compliance to IDEA indicators can include "program review activities, technical assistance, improvement activities, and federally-mandated enforcement actions" (Special Education, n.d., p.1). Repercussions for the current designation for the school district's lack of compliance to Indicator B-14 included a program review and meetings with the local education service district to determine technical assistance

needs for district improvement. These interventions fall under the technical assistance category of enforcement actions outlined by OSPI (Special Education, n.d.).

Students enrolled in school district programs are also significantly impacted by this problem of practice. Baer and Daviso (2011) suggest that "poor alignment" of transition planning to post-school goals and outcomes can have a negative effect on quality of life and access to resources after the student graduates from high school (p. 175). Improved relationships and supports for community partners allow students leaving formal schooling to begin their post-secondary experience with authentic employment experiences and community mentors. When students participate in internships while still enrolled in secondary public education, they acquire valuable employment skills and increase the likelihood of gaining competitive employment (Wehman et al., 2018). In the most successful cases, students could obtain paid employment experiences while they were enrolled in the school district's programs.

Research Questions.

The following research questions guide this study. What impacts the attitudes of employers in hiring employees with disabilities? What programmatic approaches impact the attitudes of employers in hiring employees with disabilities? The outcome I hoped to reach through authentic interactions with employers of individuals with disabilities was a set of strategies and programmatic approaches that will support both employers and students with disabilities who seek employment.

The goal of this study was to assist the school district and transition programming staff in cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships that address the skills and employment needs of students in the transition program, as well as the labor needs of local businesses. These partnerships ensure that participants of the school district's adult transition program receive

authentic working experiences and the highest potential for customized integrated employment or competitive integrated employment.

Personal Context

Researcher's Roles and Background

I am currently the Transition Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) who will lead the evaluation and improvement of competitive employment outcomes for students receiving special education services within the school district's post-secondary adult transition program. For the last three years, I have served as the primary point of contact for community partners who have agreed to serve as internship sites for adult transition program student workers. In addition, I developed the framework and structure of the skills-based classroom component of the transition program to prepare students for the demands of the workplace.

Within this action research study, I not only sought to gain insight into employer attitudes toward hiring of individuals with disabilities, but I also desired to remain close to the experiences and impressions of the employers throughout the interpretive process (Gehman et al., 2018). Patton (2015) describes qualitative inquiry as particular to the researcher's experiences, competencies, and interpersonal skills, as well as impacted by a researcher's ability to reflect upon the field work. While there is no intention of acting as an outside researcher who may "impose prior constructs" (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 17) to understand or explain the experiences of business owners in the community, I do commit to the role of diligent reporter. In my previous experiences working with community partners, I found that professional relationships and camaraderie form during the continuous contact of supervising student intern experiences. This rapport with employers allows me to understand them as individuals in a more holistic manner, beyond their interactions with interns and program staff.

Journey to the Problem

During my first year with the adult transition program, I met with local businesses and non-profit groups to propose and schedule community experiences for students enrolled in the program. I found that a significant number of organizations had volunteer opportunities they were eager to fill with our adult transition students. The students gained a great deal of experience working as part of a team, providing manual labor, and contributing to the community. Through these volunteer experiences, however, the students had few opportunities to engage in customer service-oriented tasks, interact with the public, or gain specific skills related to the careers and industries noted in the transition plans of their IEPs. When I met with businesses to propose unpaid internships that were skill or job-specific, few organizations were eager to partner with our program and mentor one of our students. Usually, within the first ten minutes of each meeting, it would become apparent if the manager or owner of the business was open to the idea of collaborating with our program or not. Similar to cold-call sales, these meetings were with local companies that had no prior relationship with the adult transition program because the district's program was not well known within the community. The transition program's existing community partnerships were established through a small number of personal relationships with the previous transition program staff.

In the fall of 2018, I met with the service manager of the largest car dealership in town. He was initially too busy to meet in person, but requested that I email him information about the program and we could meet after his review. When we were able to meet in person, he mentioned the challenges he faces in hiring qualified individuals for openings in his department. I spoke about the strengths of the student I was trying to place in the detail shop, which this

manager supervised. The meeting ended with two unpaid internships scheduled, one in the detail shop and one in the diagnostic bay of the service area.

Within two weeks of the meeting with the service manager, the two young men began their unpaid internships with the car dealership. An assistant manager supervised the young man who was working in the detail shop. During the first scheduled shift of the internship, the assistant manager commented to the program staff that it was unclear as to why the student was in the detail shop because he was not someone they would ever hire. The program staff suggested that the assistant manager speak to the service manager because he agreed to the internship arrangement. I emailed the service manager to make him aware of the conversation that took place at the detail shop in front of the student intern. The service manager responded that he would handle the situation, and he hoped we would return the following week to continue the internship.

The attitudinal changes that occurred in the assistant manager and his staff at the detail shop over the following months were awe-inspiring. Each employee of the detail shop has their own space for supplies (i.e., shammy, gloves, cleaners, etc.). In the initial weeks of the internship, the intern had to borrow the supplies of others to assist with washing, drying, and vacuuming the vehicles he was detailing. Before winter break, the assistant manager presented the intern with a space of his own, a hat with the dealership emblem, and a shammy. The assistant manager told the intern he was part of the team and should have his own supplies like everyone else. The intern beamed when he returned to the high school campus and informed everyone that he loved his work at the detail shop. In late March, the student became sick and missed nearly two weeks of school. Each time I called the detail shop to inform the assistant manager of a schedule conflict or the intern's absence from the transition program, the assistant

manager would describe how they have come to rely on the intern's contribution and the ways he brightens their day. In the last weeks of the school year, as the internship was coming to an end, the service manager offered to write both interns a letter of recommendation to help them obtain competitive employment. The service manager and the assistant manager also suggested they would hire the intern at the detail shop, if he was ready to work.

This particular internship experience demonstrated that initial attitudes and presumptions about a young adult with a disability could change with exposure to the individual in a work environment and support from program staff as a resource for the intern and employer. The experience with the service manager and assistant manager provided many lessons. The shift to a more inclusive culture at the detail shop prompted reflection of how the transition program staff and I could play a role in changing attitudes of employers to create opportunities for our students. The young adult was able to work and experience the camaraderie of a workplace with coworkers without disabilities. The result was that the experience was positive for both the intern and the business partner, and the business partner was confident enough in the intern's skills to offer him a job. Competitive employment is the goal for each student participating in the adult transition program, so increased focus on how these attitudinal changes can be encouraged to benefit the program, the student, and community is needed.

Significant stakeholders

The Special Education staff at the district office and within the high school are dedicated to improving the educational and career outcomes of students. Changes within the organizational structure at the district level demonstrate this commitment. The district Special Education Director has hired three TOSAs who support special education classroom teachers in addition to leading special programs. The Special Education Director has also revised the district's Special

Education Handbook to reflect changes in state legislation and to improve processes and procedures to ensure compliance to state and federal mandates. I will share the results of this study with the Special Education Director, district TOSAs, and with special education staff at the high school to strengthen the development of secondary student transition plans and to increase community-based opportunities for high school students receiving special education services.

The students currently participating in the adult transition program and students who are planning to participate in the adult transition program are the primary beneficiary of this study. Given the limited number of employers in the community, relationships must be established to increase opportunities for the students to obtain competitive employment in their community. Employment within the community can positively impact the student's health and level of independence. The results of this study will be integrated into the framework and procedures of the unpaid internship component of the adult transition program to provide benefits to subsequent students in the program.

Local businesses also benefit. The school district provides support to a higher than average percentage of students receiving special education services and many of these students are not exited from special education services before graduation (S. Jones, Personal Communication, November 1, 2019). It is beneficial for local businesses to gain more authentic experience with young adults with disabilities because it is highly likely these young adults will be customers of their establishment as well as applicants for open positions. Greater experience and support working with young adults with disabilities can assist a business in training and hiring employees for positions that may currently experience high rates of turnover or are hard to fill.

Important terms

Competitive Integrated Employment – work performed for which an individual with a disability is paid at least minimum wage, with the same level of benefits as individuals without disabilities, in the same environment with individuals without disabilities, and with the same advancement opportunities as individuals without disabilities (Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act, 2014).

Customized Integrated Employment – creation of a new job description that meets business needs and uses an individual's unique strengths and competencies, often involves the coordination of an employment specialist who provides on the job training and supports (Wehman, et al., 2018, p. 135).

Demand-side Employment – emphasis on employment strategies and "preparation of persons with disabilities for jobs that employers need to fill" (as quoted in Chan et al, 2010, p. 413).

Disability – "A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities" (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).

Former Student – "youth ages 16-21 with an IEP who left high school by graduating with a diploma, aging out, dropping out, or who were expected to return and did not" (Center for Change in Transition Services, 2019).

IDEA Indicator B-14, section C – is the reporting indicator for post-school outcomes for students receiving special education or related services. It is "defined within IDEA as the percent of youth who: are no longer in school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and within one year of leaving high school met reporting requirements for one of the post-school engagement outcomes" (Center for Change in Transition Services, 2019).

Individual with a disability - a person who has a disability and who is not a user of illegal drugs (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990)

Rural – county in which the largest city has a population under 35,000 people (Johnson, 2008)

Semi-rural – county in which the largest city has a population between 35,000-100,00 people (Johnson, 2008).

Closing Thoughts on Chapter I

Identifying strategies and supports that a school district can provide to local business that are not mandated to comply with federal Americans with Disabilities Act requirements could benefit many of the other rural and semi rural school districts in Southwest Washington State. Numerous other districts in the immediate area must balance the use of resources, federal compliance to IDEA, and successful post-school outcomes for students. Students living in rural and semi-rural areas report fewer outcomes related to post-secondary education and training or competitive employment (Johnson, 2008). This study seeks to identify the strategies and supports that encourage business owners, who are not mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act, to hire individuals with disabilities.

As a researcher who works with both students with disabilities and with local businesses, I have the opportunity to observe the growth of a student's skill set and the attitudinal changes of employers. In this study, I have gained greater understanding of the needs of local employers and how the partnership of the employer and school district can support meeting the needs of both the student and employer. I do not intend to generalize the results of this study beyond informing program components of the school district; however, the results can be informative to other school districts with similar demographics and geographical considerations.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF SUPPORTING SCHOLARSHIP

Transitions move individuals from one life stage to the next. The consequential transition from school to adulthood demands that individuals consider "career options, living arrangements, social life, and economic goals" (Will, 1983, p. 2). Entering into the complex world of vocational rehabilitation and other state-provided services compounds the challenges for individuals with disabilities. This transition is often met with uncertainty regarding the balance of security and independence, support needed, and the potential for work as an adult with a disability (Akkerman et al., 2016; Anderson et al., 2018; Sosnowy et al., 2017). Employment provides opportunities for greater security and independence, social supports, and community involvement.

Employment fosters social and emotional development in addition to providing greater financial independence. Wehman et al. (2018) acknowledged soft skill acquisition as a result of direct work experiences. The ability for an individual with a disability to engage in appropriate conversations and greetings with co-workers and supervisors promotes continued learning of social cues and subtleties of body language. Sosnowy et al. (2017) reported that study participants described work experiences as a source of community engagement and empowerment. Employment offers individuals with disabilities opportunities to develop a supportive environment beyond their family and their public school services; however, despite federal and state-level initiatives, the unemployment rate of individuals with disabilities remains significantly higher than that of nondisabled individuals (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2019).

Existing literature related to the hiring and retention of individuals with disabilities has become more prevalent over the last forty years. Studies investigated skill-based factors of individuals with disabilities (Carter et al., 2012; Ju et al., 2014) and service-based factors

(Graham et al., 2013; Hagner & Cooney, 2003; Shogren et al., 2017; Test & Fowler, 2018; Wehman et al., 2018). In each study, public education provides a foundation for the ultimate goal of employment for individuals with disabilities. Wehman et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of school-community relationships and underscored Will's (1983) view of school transition planning as one that provides "relevant community opportunities and service combinations" to meet the individual needs of students (p. 3). School-based transition planning of academic and adaptive skills, integration of post-secondary services, and post-secondary education are all for not if employers in the community are unwilling to hire and retain workers with disabilities.

As a school district strengthens coordination of transition planning and services, expanding school-community partnerships provide authentic work experiences for individuals with disabilities (Ju et al., 2014; Wehman et al., 2018). These partnerships challenge employer assumptions regarding employment roles in the community (Iwanga et al., 2018; Raynor et al, 2018). School district leadership seeks to ensure that community partners obtain needed supports during students' authentic work experiences. Walls School District expects staff to provide opportunities to showcase the competent work performance of students with disabilities and collaborate with employers in setting high expectations for work experiences. The staff's role will be to offer practical knowledge to employers as they become more familiar with supporting an individual with disabilities in the workplace (Chan et al. 2010; Inge et al., 2018; Shogren et al., 2017; Tilson & Simonsen, 2013). Facilitating positive post-secondary employment outcomes requires consideration of the fit of the person to the environment (Akkerman et al., 2016; Anderson et al., 2018; Inge et al., 2018), the ability to connect people with resources (Bumble et

al., 2017; Tilson & Simonsen, 2013), and the exploration of reasonable workplace accommodations (Chan et al., 2010; Delman et al., 2017; Sundar, 2017).

Relevant Historical Background

Throughout the review of current literature, employers' attitudes contribute to employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Stone and Colella (1996) not only provided a theoretical model, but they also suggested a roadmap for future research of factors impacting the treatment of people with disabilities in the workplace. In the time since its publication, additional studies have both supported and refuted claims assumed by this model, and additional legislation (ADA Amendments Act, 2008; Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2014) has passed to provide more equitable employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Iwanga et al., 2018). However, the clarity that Stone and Colella (1996) provided and the multidisciplinary approach used to develop the model allows subsequent researchers to view the complex interactions impacting the treatment of people with disabilities in the workplace, while also allowing researchers to develop ideas within a narrowed breath of those interactions (Erickson et al., 2014; Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Lyons et al., 2018).

The stated intention of the theoretical model is to ensure "fair treatment" of individuals with disabilities in the workplace (Stone & Colella, 1996, p. 356). The model serves three purposes: provide a framework for the influences that impact people with disabilities in the workplace; increase interest in the related research issues and serve as a guide for further research. The authors outlined the central, generally conservative, assumptions of the model. The first assumption is the definition of disability, and the authors used the same definition that exists within the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). The definition of disability is "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities" of an

individual (§12102). The second assumption reflects disability as a component of diversity that had not been fully integrated into conventional conceptualizations of diversity. The third assumption is that the person with a disability can perform the job in question. This assumption is pivotal because other publications utilize a deficiency model and focus on ways to improve the skills of the individual with disabilities (Ju et al., 2014). The deficiency model approach places the responsibility for workplace difficulties entirely on the individual with disabilities; however, the Stone and Colella (1996) model asserts that multiple factors impact the employment experiences of people with disabilities. The fourth and final assumption is that employers and co-workers have limited experience working with individuals with disabilities. Siperstein et al. (2006) challenged this assertion in finding that 40% of participants in their study had a family member with a disability, and 70% of participants reported having worked with someone with a disability.

The type of disability, the attractiveness of the disability, the origin of the disability, and the temporal nature of the disability exist as factors under the category of "attributes of the disabled person" in Stone and Colella's (1996) model (p. 355). Different types of disabilities refer to physical impairments, mental health diagnosis or learning disabilities, sensory processing disorders, neurological conditions, or addictions (Stone & Colella, 1996). The attractiveness of the disability refers to "extent to which the condition or disability makes the person ugly, repulsive, or upsetting to others" (Stone & Colella, 1996, p. 362). The origin of the disability, according to Stone and Colella (1996), is the extent to which an individual is perceived to be responsible for their disability, a congenital condition or a condition that results from the individual's past behavior. The parsing of these attributes initially appears excessive; however, studies of individual aspects demonstrate that each component serves as its potential obstacle to

employment. Contemporary research demonstrates that a hierarchy exists for employer preference in the type of disability for an employee with a disability (Dutta et al., 2008; Simonsen et al., 2015; Unger, 2002). Employers reported greater concerns in hiring a person with a visual impairment or blindness, in comparison to individuals with other disabilities (McDonnall et al., 2015). During study interviews, Kocman et al (2017) asked employers to rank their preference for employing individuals with different disabilities; data indicated a preference for individuals with physical disabilities when compared to people with intellectual disabilities or mental disorders.

Employer expectancies and biases influence application, interview and hiring methods (Carter et al. 2016; Erickson, et al. 2014). Chan et al. (2010) suggested that individuals with disabilities must be prepared with strategies to overcome the initial impressions and biases of employers. Self-advocacy statements or disclosure of the disability linked to an individual's resume may assist a person with disabilities in proactively addressing employer stereotypes and expectancies (Draper et al., 2011). Ohl et al. (2017) reported that participants who disclosed their Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis were three times more likely to be employed. In contrast, Ameri et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study using resumes and cover letters in which some of the applicants disclosed a disability and others did not. The responses indicated 26% fewer responses indicating employer interest for the applicants with a disability. There was also a 34% difference in the preference for a professionally certified, experienced person disclosing a disability compared to a recent college graduate who disclosed a disability within application materials. These results support an earlier study by Simonsen et al (2015) in which the traditional method of applying for advertised positions is deemed an ineffective method for individuals with disabilities.

Personal characteristics and previous experience with individuals with disabilities characterize what Stone and Colella (1996) referred to as "attributes of the observer" (p. 370). The authors suggested that personal characteristics that include high self-esteem, tolerance for ambiguity, empathy, and emotional adjustment increase the likelihood that a supervisor or co-worker will be accepting of an individual with disabilities in the workplace. Kosyluk et al (2014) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between past hiring behavior and future hiring behavior of individuals with serious psychiatric disabilities, and how these behaviors were mediated by employer stigma or negative stereotypes. The researchers reported a negative relationship between previous hiring and employer stigma, as well as a negative relationship between employer stigma and future hiring behavior. The authors posit that a positive hiring experience is likely to lead to future hiring of individuals with serious psychiatric disabilities. In a subsequent study, McDonnall et al. (2015) studied employer attitudes toward people with limited or no vision, and reported three significant predictors in hiring an applicant with a visual impairment: "previous experience hiring someone who was blind or visually impaired, having communicated with VR [Vocational Rehabilitation], and knowledge" (p. 46). These researchers described knowledge as information about how a blind or visually impaired person can work using accommodations, assistive technology, and compensatory methods. The use of peer support workers, nondisabled peers who provide support to individuals with disabilities in the workplace, has been identified as an effective strategy to increase inclusivity and demonstrate the abilities of co-workers with disabilities (Delman et al., 2017; Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014).

Observers may have a variety of affective reactions to the experience of working with people with disabilities. Results of a public opinion study (Siperstein et al., 2006), interviews of employers across all industries (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008), and document reviews (Delman et

al., 2017; Kocman, 2017) suggest that the prospect of hiring individuals with disabilities may inspire fear of the unknown, rather than of the disability. Disability training provides employers with information about the health and psychosocial components of disabilities to reduce fears and concerns surrounding the hiring of individuals with disabilities (Iwanga et al., 2018; Stoker & Orwat, 2018). As a means of disability training and local, community problem solving, community conversations bring together a variety of stakeholders (employers, individuals with disabilities, disability advocates, and state agency representatives) to share perspectives (Bumble et al., 2017). Participants of community conversations aim to generate solutions to the posed questions (Raynor et al., 2018) and to assess community needs to improve employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Bumble et al., 2017).

Environmental and organizational factors impact businesses in a global manner and help to shape the culture of the workplace. Stone and Colella (1996) identify legislation as an environmental factor and technology, norms, values, policies, and procedures as organizational factors. The authors predicted that the ADA would increase access and workplace opportunities for individuals with disabilities; however, unemployment trends for individuals with disabilities remain at levels that are more than double that of workers without disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Rather than reliance on legislation alone, approaches that address employer policies and work environments is needed (Lindsay et al., 2018). Current research has identified an inclusive company culture (Delman, 2017; Iwanga, 2018), diversity training (Bumble et al., 2017; Erickson et al., 2014), and employer partnerships with agencies or organizations that provide services for individuals with disabilities (McDonnall, et al., 2015; Kocman, 2017; Simonsen et al. 2015) as factors that provide benefit to employers and improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, the protected class definition under ADA

has narrowed through several Supreme Court decisions (Burkhauser & Stapleton, 2004) and the burden of proof falls mainly on the individual with a disability (Lee, 2003). Organizational factors continue to serve as barriers to employment; knowledge of ADA and the inclusion of disabilities in a company's diversity plan continue to be significant predictors of a company's likelihood of hiring individuals with disabilities (Chan et al., 2010; Simonsen et al., 2015; Sundar, 2017).

Alignment with Action Research Traditions

This study aligns with action research traditions in both scope and approach. Action research seeks to study a problem of practice and improve outcomes for the situation or individuals concerned (Feldman et al., 2018). The motive for this study centers upon improving post secondary outcomes for students receiving Special Education services in the Walls School District. Former students of the school district experience poor post secondary outcomes in relation to enrollment in community college, vocational school, or competitive employment. As Patton (2015) described, the purpose of action research is to "solve problems in a program, organization, or community" (p. 250). Data from this study informed the creation of an artifact to improve supports to both students and community partners within the area served by the school district.

In the present study, I aimed to capture the diverse perspectives of stakeholders within the community. Shogren et al. (2017) found that project sites with greater diversity in stakeholder participation also had more significant increases in employment outcomes. Small business from a variety of industries, which have existing partnerships with the local school district, were recruited for this study to underscore the importance of building relationships to improve post secondary outcomes. Qualitative data was collected in the field and included semi-structured

interviews and a researcher reflexivity journal. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for one-on-one, confidential responses to questions. During the interviews and subsequent analysis, my intention was to maintain the voice of the interviewee (Gioia et al., 2012) and to consider the "interpersonal interactions" (Patton, 2015, p. 250) between me and participants. The researcher reflexivity journal served as an archive of impressions, connections, contextual cues, and considerations for further inquiry.

Theoretical Framework

Both employers and individuals with disabilities benefit from inclusivity in the workplace (Sundar, 2017). Identifying the supports and strategies that small business owners need to hire and retain individuals with disabilities will improve the post secondary outcomes for former Walls School District students and will help support the local economy. Nationwide, employers have reported profitability in terms of increased sales, reduced costs, and increased retention of trained employees (Lindsey et al., 2018) as value-added benefits of retaining individuals with disabilities in the workplace. For individuals with disabilities, employment not only provides economic independence and social supports, but it can also improve self-esteem (Campbell et al., 2011) and "quality of life" (Bond & Drake, 2014, p. 69).

A focus on the demand side of employment for individuals with disabilities bridges the pathway needed for young adults with disabilities to enter the competitive workforce. Madeline Will (1983) initially suggested the metaphor of bridges from high school to employment for students with disabilities. Research studies frequently focus on supply side factors like curriculum and skill mastery (Lindsay et al., 2018), but this study places attention on the demand side needs of employers. Interviews and observations offer insight into the unique perspectives of small business owners. The view and experiences of these employers aided in identifying the

needed supports for employers that will ease the transition of former Walls School district students into competitive employment positions within the community. A prominent theme in Raynor et al. (2018) was a need for partnerships within the community that provided strategies to support employers' efforts to hire and retain workers with disabilities. This study expands on this theme and further identifies the types of strategies that employers feel are needed.

Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) provides the theoretical framework for this study. Glaser and Valley (2018) delineated the grounded theory researcher as one who enters an area of research without a clear sense of the problem, but with "the abstract wonderment of what is going on that is an issue and how it is handled" (p.4). In Walsh et al. (2015), Glaser clarified that Grounded Theory is "simply the discovery of emerging patterns in data" (p. 593). Open-ended interview questions will serve as a catalyst for employers to share their perspectives in their own words. Glaser cautioned researchers to use procedures that conform to the Grounded Theory model when discovering patterns in study data. This theoretical model requires the use of coding (open and selective), theoretical sampling, and memos. Initial and secondary coding of the study data, as well the reflexive journal, ensured that deduced patterns are grounded in the data. I remained grounded in the "words, perceptions, and experiences of people" involved in the study (Trainor, 2018, p. 4).

Most Significant Research and Practice Studies

The path to changing employer attitudes to a more inclusive culture begins with dispelling the most common concerns employers raise about hiring individuals with disabilities. Mark Legnick-Hall (2007) identified five myths that impact an employer's decision to hire an individual with disabilities: a) lack of knowledge, skills, and abilities; b) lower job performance, attendance, and productivity than their nondisabled peers; c) higher cost to accommodate the

needs of workers with disabilities; d) higher risk for litigation; e) customer and co-worker reactions to employees with disabilities. Additional studies have examined the accuracy of these five employer misconceptions.

Five Myths of Employing Individuals with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities lack the knowledge, skills, and abilities. This myth relies on an over-generalized deficiency model to align employment needs and the knowledge, skills, and abilities of individuals with disabilities. The deficiency model illustrates the goal of the ADA—to prompt employers to objectively view an individual with a disability based on what they can do rather than automatically discredit the applicant or employee because of a disability (Burkhauser & Stapleton, 2004). A study of adults with ASD, in which 86% of the study participants held more than a high school diploma and 50% worked fewer than 40 hours a week, identified education level as a predictor of employment (Ohl et al., 2017). Young adults with ASD and their families reported a mismatch of skills with available employment and held the perception that employers underestimated the young person's abilities (Anderson et al., 2018).

Additional studies compared the formal education, training, and experience of individuals with disabilities to counterparts without disabilities. In 2017, 34.4% of non-institutionalized adults with a disability, ages 21-64, attained a high school diploma or equivalent compared to 25.0% of peers without a disability in the same age group (Erickson et al., 2017). Ameri et al. (2018) evaluated employer interest in hypothetical applicants who disclosed a disability compared to applicants with the same materials who did not disclose a disability. Researchers submitted resumes of novice and experienced applicants with college degrees. Applications of the more experienced applicant received less interest from employers than those of the novice

applicant. Applications that did not disclose a disability received greater employer interest than those that disclosed a disability.

Individuals with disabilities have lower job performance, attendance, and productivity than their nondisabled peers. This contention hinges on a concern that individuals with disabilities will, in some way, slow production, underperform their nondisabled peers, or will require extensive time away from work. Employers who have experience hiring individuals with disabilities suggest that the opposite of this misconception is true. Supervisors of interns with disabilities reported a motivation to learn, punctuality and good attendance, strong work ethic, and a willingness to complete repetitive tasks as significant strengths observed over the duration of the internship (Muller & VanGilder, 2014). Simonsen et al. (2015) reported that hiring professionals' evaluation of a young person with disabilities' performance was the most critical factor in the hiring decision.

Kendall and Karns (2018) and Wehman et al. (2018) pointed to anecdotal evidence of the benefits to performance and productivity after hiring individuals with disabilities. Kendall and Karns (2018) described a grocery chain's experience in hiring a young man with Down's syndrome as a greeter in one store, and note that the store's revenue and traffic into the store increases on days in which the young man works. Hiring individuals with disabilities at Amazon's sort centers resulted in filling high-need, part-time positions that previously had a high turnover (Kendall & Kerns, 2018). Amazon's new hires, who also disclosed a disability, maintained the expectations for safety, productivity, and quality required of all workers (Kendall & Kerns, 2018). Wehman et al. (2018) suggested that growing anecdotal evidence demonstrates employer awareness of the contributions and abilities of individuals with disabilities.

Hiring an individual with disabilities involves greater cost to accommodate their needs. Research studies have disputed this misconception since the initial passage of ADA. Title I of the ADA requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to individuals with a disability, as long as providing the accommodation does not create an undue hardship on the company (Blanck, 1995). Reasonable accommodations need not be costly or complicated. Necessary accommodations for workers at a newly constructed Walgreens distribution center accounted for less than $25 of building project costs (Lewis, 2012). The Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a contractor for the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, provides consultation services to employers and has collected data from employers since 2004 (Job Accommodation Network, n.d.). Of nearly 800 employers who shared accommodation costs with JAN, 58% reported providing accommodations that did not result in added costs and 37% experienced a one-time cost to provide an accommodation needed by an employee (Job Accommodation Network, 2019). In a study of hearing restaurant managers who supervised workers with hearing loss, the most common accommodations were: gesture, demonstration, and written communication (Stokar & Orwat, 2018).

Hiring an individual with disabilities places the employer at greater risk for litigation. While federal legislation and regulations provide a framework designed to create an inclusive workplace, when bringing forth litigation the burden of proof lies upon people with disabilities. Analysis of cases claiming ADA violations suggests that most courts defer to the employer's judgment when assessing whether the law covers the individual and if the accommodation is reasonable (Lee, 2003; Legnick-Hall et al., 2008). Individuals with disabilities must demonstrate "a prima facie case of disability discrimination" which must include: the plaintiff meets the statutory definition of disability; the plaintiff is qualified for the position and

complete the "essential functions" of the position; the plaintiff must demonstrate that a reasonable accommodation exists, and the plaintiff must show that the termination or adverse action was due to the plaintiff's disability (Lee, 2003, p. 16). In many cases, plaintiffs struggle to demonstrate the first two components, and few courts have deliberated the "reasonableness" of the demanded accommodations (p. 17). When the Supreme Court ruled in *Toyota Motor Manufacturing v. Williams* 2002, they narrowed the interpretation of the "substantial limitation" of the disability on "major life function," clarifying that it must be a function that is "of central importance to most people's daily lives" rather than "an important portion of the individual's job" (p. 17). A review of judgments made by Federal Appellate Courts from July 1992 to June 2000, found that nearly three-quarters of the decisions fell in favor of the employer (Lee, 2003).

In 2008, the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAA) passed and clarified the definition and interpretation of terminology with the ADA, as a response to Supreme Court decisions regarding ADA (Mitchell, 2017). The U.S. Supreme court has not taken an ADA case since the passing of the ADAA; however, U.S. District courts in Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, and Tennessee ruled in favor of plaintiffs who brought ADAA claims on the basis of disabilities that limited a major life function (Mitchell, 2017). In the case brought to jury trial in Indiana of a diabetic paramedic who was denied accommodations and terminated for behavior following episodes of low blood sugar, the court cited other decisions to remedy the complaint with an accommodation of intermittent snack breaks (Mitchell, 2017). Protections related to the "essential functions" of the job depend on a cluster of factors that include: "employer's judgment, the written job description, time spent performing the function, consequences of not performing the function, and work experiences of employees in the same or similar position" (Findley et al., 2017, p. 19). Recommendations from human resource and legal experts suggest

outlining the essential functions within the job description and to share the essential functions with the physician performing any medical evaluation (Findley et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 1997). In *EEOC v. American Tool and Mold*, the court found that the screening company failed to complete an individualized assessment of a probationary employee's ability to perform the essential duties of the position and the company did not provide job descriptions to medical professionals completing pre-employment screenings (Findley et al., 2017).

Customer and co-worker reactions limit businesses' ability to hire individuals with disabilities. Businesses must protect their brand and their company culture, and this misconception implies that hiring people with disabilities subverts these two elements of a company's identity. Numerous research studies have investigated the responses of co-workers, managers, and consumers in relation to the presence of individuals with disabilities within a company. When individuals with disabilities demonstrate their skills and abilities, they contribute to a productive workplace and this positive contact affects others in the workplace (JAN, 2019). When co-workers, managers, and consumers perceive a positive contact with individuals with disabilities, the positive experience impacts work-related outcomes, personal outcomes, and interpersonal outcomes; in this way, stereotypes and attitudes toward individuals with disabilities shift to become more inclusive and substituted by more accurate beliefs about people with disabilities (Erickson et al., 2014; Kendall & Karns, 2018; Stone & Colella, 1996). Stoker and Orwat (2018) reported evidence that negative reactions to employees with disabilities are "more relevant to work tasks and accommodation than to social integration" (p. 30).

Attitudes of the general public suggest that hiring individuals with disabilities could improve both company culture and public view of the brand. Siperstein et al. (2006) found, in more than 800 phone interviews, that the majority of participants had experiences with

individuals with disabilities, and 44% of participants had a family member with a disability. The results of this study also revealed that 87% of respondents would give their business to companies that employed people with disabilities, and 90% agreed that hiring people with disabilities "helped other employees have a better understanding of persons with disabilities" (p. 7). A 2013 study of restaurant patrons found that 5% of participants identified as disabled and 38% of participants had a close friend or family member who was disabled (Kuo & Kalargyrou, 2014). The researchers also reported statistically significant results regarding positive attitudes of patrons receiving service from an individual with a mental or physical disability. Lindsay et al. (2018) reported hospitality and service industries as having the most consistent advantage in hiring individuals with disabilities due to increased opportunities for employees to interact with customers.

Closing Thoughts on Chapter II

Having a job and earning a wage forms part of the American ideal. It is a hallmark of adulthood and independence in the United States. Legislators' attempts to force the inclusion of people with disabilities have had little impact on the overall number of individuals with disabilities who subsist outside of the workforce. In order to produce the desired change, employer attitudes and company culture must be addressed through a more nuanced approach. A paradigm shift to a culture of inclusivity and adoption of an ability model, rather than a deficiency model, is needed. Research suggests education surrounding realistic outcomes of hiring individuals with disabilities will provide employers with a sense of what is possible; however, experience working with people with disabilities leverages a greater impact on the implicit biases and stereotypes that human resources leaders, managers, and co-workers may carry into the workplace. Consumer attitudes that embrace inclusivity play a role in nudging businesses to reconsider their hiring practices. A multipronged strategy provides an optimistic approach to address the steady unemployment rate of individuals with disabilities.

CHAPTER III: SOLUTION AND METHOD

Outline of the Proposed Solution

In coordination with transition program staff that support students during internships, I explored supports and strategies for businesses within the community that promote the hiring and retention of individuals with disabilities. Data collected from participating, local businesses inform the direction of inquiry and my role as researcher using the Grounded Theory framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Based on the responses of local employers, strategies that provide a means of support to businesses were identified, and professional development will be provided to district staff regarding the utilization of these strategies. The identified strategies will become a component of the transition program framework. The "utility premise" (Patton, 2015, p. 690) asserts that research findings are more likely to become a part of professional practice when those expected to use the findings are a part of the research. The goal of this research is to address a local problem of practice, and while the results may not be generalized to other districts or areas of the country, the support strategies will be generalized to small businesses in the community that are not currently partners with the transition program. Generalization in this qualitative study is limited, but the potential for understanding the particularities of the problem of practice is a benefit of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2014).

The support strategies identified from this study align with the current framework of the district's transition program, which coordinates student support as students participate in volunteer and unpaid internship opportunities with partnering businesses in the community. The goal of student participation is the development of valuable employment skills and experiences. Transition program staff members accompany students to different worksites and maintain frequent interaction with business owners and managers. Program staff currently rely heavily on

rapport and relationship-building to address the needs and concerns of worksite employers. It is the goal of this research to identify specific strategies that further understanding of the employment potential of students with disabilities. The needs of the employer are addressed more directly through the exploratory nature of this study, and the resulting artifact will be used to proactively provide support rather than incidental, reactionary supports to community partners.

Justification of Proposed Solution

This qualitative study investigates the levels of support that employers find most beneficial when working with Walls School District transition program staff and students. As the researcher, I analyzed the data to determine the impact that support has on an employers' propensity to hire an individual with disabilities. This research builds upon recently formed community partnerships with businesses in the community. The goal being to determine what support and what strategies program staff can utilize to educate and empower employers in hiring individuals with disabilities. Employer misconceptions regarding the abilities and skill potential of individuals with disabilities is an existing problem of practice in the Walls School District. The school district aims to collaborate with community members in order to prepare students for success in obtaining competitive integrated employment.

This study benefits the transition programming and planning at Walls School District, secondary students receiving special education services, and small business owners in the community served by the school district. The potential benefits of this study to society exist in the ability to strategically prepare students and employers to employ individuals with disabilities in local businesses which are exempt from federal Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. Previous research (Akkerman, 2016; Bond & Drake, 2014; Kelley & Buchanan, 2017; Kocman,

2017; Lindsay et al., 2018) has shown that when individuals with disabilities are employed, they can enjoy greater independence and healthier lives; in turn, when employers hire individuals with disabilities, the employer often discovers that the myths around supporting employees with disabilities are unfounded.

Study Context and Participants

The spread of the COVID-19 virus prompted closures of schools and businesses across Washington State, and on March 13, 2020 the Walls School District announced that the district was closing for three weeks to slow the spread of the virus within the community (Flanagan, 2020). Proclamation 20-09 announced school closures for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year (Inslee, 2020, April 6). In a subsequent announcement on August 5, 2020, Governor Inslee shared the Department of Health's recommendation for an initial phase of remote instruction for all public and private schools for the 2020-2021 school year (Washington State Department of Health, 2020). Walls School District has followed the recommendations from the Department of Health (see Appendix B) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, providing all students with remote instruction indefinitely. Given the current restrictions in place due to COVID-19, students and staff of the Walls Adult Transition Program will not have direct contact with any community partners while the district provides remote instruction.

Governor Inslee (2020, March 23) issued the "Stay Home-Stay Healthy" order for the state of Washington. Essential businesses were allowed to operate during the "Stay Home-Stay Healthy" order but were required to put social distancing and other safety measures in place to limit transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Gradually, business and public spaces began to reopen during the summer, following Governor Inslee's "Safe Start" phases (see Appendix C); however, due to a surge in COVID-19 confirmed cases within the state, Governor Inslee paused

all reopening measures indefinitely (Inslee, 2020, July). Walls School District is located within a county that paused in phase 2 of the reopening plan. Businesses within the county must progress to phase 4 of the reopening plan before Walls Adult Transition Program students and staff will be allowed to volunteer or intern with community partners in the local area.

Local businesses within the community who have prior experience working with the Walls Adult Transition Program students and staff or businesses that have an existing relationship with the school district and experience hiring individuals with disabilities are the participants for this study. Interviews took place via video conferencing technology to ensure social distancing measures were followed. Personal information was not collected in order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of study participants. Members of vulnerable populations were not eligible as a study participant and were not present during data collection. Each subject is an adult employee within the business who is responsible for interviewing and hiring new employees. Data collection materials contain a pseudonym for the business' name and a four-digit numerical code for the subject. This information is typed on the heading of the data collection page and used for tracking purposes only. Each piece of data was coded with the business and subject identifiers so the participant's data can be kept separate and unidentifiable.

Proposed Research Paradigm

This Record of Study focuses on social aspects of lived experiences of individuals, particularly employers of small businesses. The methodology is exploratory in that current literature provides limited guidance on how changes in perceptions and experiences of observers (employers in this study) impact the hiring practices of people with disabilities. A qualitative approach anchored in Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) allowed for an in-depth analysis of the constructs pertinent to the viewpoint of employers of small businesses and how

the use of supports can change employer perspectives to more positively impact the employment potential for individuals with disabilities. The study was conducted in the field, which is a prominent characteristic of the qualitative approach (Inge et al., 2018). Small, local businesses and their facilities provided the field for the employer interviews in this study.

Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) described this approach to theory development as one in which theory is systematically grounded in the analysis of the data. In Walsh et al. (2015), Barney Glaser clarified that Grounded Theory is "simply the discovery of emerging patterns in data" (p. 593). In discovering the patterns in study data, Glaser warned that researchers must select procedures that conform to the Grounded Theory model. Data collection frequently occurs at multiple stages to refine categories and to posit the relationship between and among the categories of data (Creswell, 2014). The Grounded Theory model requires the use of coding (open and selective), theoretical sampling, and memos. The adaptability of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the focus on comparative analysis of collected data provide prompt inductive reasoning and researcher objectivity (Patton, 2015). The model constructed from study data endeavors to convey the interrelationships among themes and concepts grounded in the data (Gioia et al., 2012). The procedures outlined in Grounded Theory minimize the impact of researcher bias, while also providing rigor to the analytical process (Patton, 2015).

Data Collection Methods

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allowed for one-on-one, confidential responses to questions, which in other situational contexts would have social norms directing appropriate responses. Kaye et al. (2011) conducted interviews with employers who were reluctant to comply with the

requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and found that respondents became defensive during the initial interviews. I recruited small businesses that had existing partnerships with the local school district. Trainor (2013) suggested that interviews conducted with someone participants know or are acquainted with lends to a relationship that facilitates the interpretation of meaning. For all community partners with the transition program, I have been the initial point of contact and have facilitated a collaborative relationship with participants. Due to constraints associated with COVID-19, participant interviews were held virtually using video conferencing. During the video conferencing, I aimed to demonstrate that I, as the researcher, had no preconceived expectations and remained non-judgmental in recording and inquiring into participant answers.

Researcher Reflective Journal

Researcher reflexivity was documented using a reflective journal. Glaser (1965) suggested that during the coding process, as the researchers muses over characteristics and categories, the creation of memos document the ideas, connections, and theoretical conceptualizations, which becomes the "content behind the categories" (p. 443). This documentation of the coding process and analysis also maintains the rigor of the qualitative study (Keesler, 2016). The reflexive journal in this study served as a reservoir of my impressions following interviews, as well as considerations of emerging categories and patterns.

A reflective journal supports the critical aspects of a rigorous qualitative study. Rather than using a reflective journal, Inge et al. (2018) tasked one experienced researcher to code and analyze the data, and a second researcher member-checked the first researcher's coding and analysis. Because I was the only researcher who coded and analyzed the data for this Record of

Study, the researcher reflective journal provided a means of member checking decisions and provides links to developed categories and theoretical implications.

Data Analysis Strategy

Constant Comparative Method

The use of the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) aligns with qualitative research methods and with the exploratory nature of my study. Glaser (1965) suggested that the constant comparative method provides tools for the qualitative investigation of social problems. The viewpoints and experiences of employers represent a persistent social problem for individuals with disabilities who desire integrated competitive employment. The constant comparative method aims to generate theory that is plausible and "remains close to the data" (p. 437). In particular, this method allows for the consideration of multiple hypotheses at varying levels of generality. The ability to compare incidents and generate multiple, plausible categories will allow for the development of integrated theories. This ability to differentiate is of particular importance, given the scarcity of theories that represent the authentic perspectives and experiences of employers who are not bound by the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Studies use the constant comparative method to organize and analyze multiple forms of data. Raynor et al. (2018) employed the constant comparison method to analyze ideas generated within community conversations and as responses to open-ended survey questions. Interview transcripts were coded using the constant comparative method to allow the researchers to construct theory through data rather than test the data against a pre-determined hypothesis (Sosnowy et al., 2018). Keesler (2016) described his use of the constant comparative method to code and analyze semi-structured interviews as "inductive and iterative" (p. 485).

Coding. The coding of data serves as an essential aspect of the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965). Initial coding requires that each incident be compared to previous incidents and then distributed among all relevant categories (Glaser, 1965). All forms of data are coded, and as categories become saturated, theoretical constructs emerge. Glaser (1965) suggested that saturation plays a pivotal role in delimiting the theory. The coded data also provides a resource that can be returned to during analysis when precise connections between data and theory are needed. Coded data may be necessary when identifying exemplary incidents for the discussion of the resulting Grounded Theory.

As part of a qualitative study, the data collected consists of textual responses and descriptions of behaviors and affect. I utilized audio recording of the video conference to capture participant's interview responses, and I transcribed the recordings. Rosenthal et al. (2012) redacted identifying information from the transcripts, and I did the same when transcribing. Data collection must be organized and analyzed systematically. The data for this study was coded and analyzed twice. Gioia et al. (2012) referred to this as first-order and second-order analysis. First-order analysis utilizes participant-centric terms and codes, while second-order analysis utilizes researcher codes, themes, and dimensions. The authors posit that the layering of participant terminology and researcher terminology in the coding process preserves the voice of participants while also demonstrating the connection between data and theory in a qualitative study. This process is similar to that of Carter et al. (2016) in which individual units of data were coded by the verb and "assigned action" contained in the data unit; then once initial coding was complete, codes were organized into categories articulated by the research team (p. 405).

Qualitative research frequently relies on the use of coding to develop and refine themes and constructs. The coding of data aided in the development of categories and their distinct

properties (Glaser, 1965). Gioia et al. (2012) warned that the number of codes may explode in the initial stages of the study but will reduce down to a manageable number. The codes generated from Raynor et al. (2018) community conversations study reflected this trend. Their study produced more than 400 units of data, which they then categorized into 20 distinct codes.

Gioia Methodology

The Gioia methodology informs the development of Grounded Theory and complements the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965). The constant comparative method functions as a general approach to qualitative research, while the Gioia methodology is a strategic approach to gain a more in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of study participants (Gehman et al., 2018). In addition, the Gioia methodology is a "holistic approach" meant to address the "conflicting need to develop new concepts inductively while meeting high standards for rigor" (Gioia et al.,2012, p. 17). Underlying assumptions for this methodology include: "the organizational world is socially constructed"; study participants are "knowledgeable agents" in that they can explain their experiences; researchers are knowledgeable in observing patterns and formulating "concepts in theoretically relevant terms" (p. 17). This methodology avoids the presumption of a priori constructs by remaining close to the data in the form of a 'researcher as reporter' role. The researcher utilizes their inductive skills to extrapolate concepts and relationships that "might escape the awareness" of study participants.

Aspects of the Gioia methodology's data collection approaches feature the authentic voice of the participant and the flexibility to revise protocols to follow the progression of the research (Gioia et al., 2012). Both qualities are exemplified in the data analysis of Bumble et al. (2017) in choosing to amend a priori category definitions and to include new data codes that more

accurately reflected the data. The researchers honored the unique contributions of participants and adjusted protocol to incorporate the additional codes into the building of theory.

My Record of Study began with interview protocols in place; however, given that researcher-participant rapport must be developed over two interviews and the extenuating circumstances prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, flexibility to return to prior lines of questioning or to introduce new interview questions, based on the direction of the data, was necessary. Yvonna Lincoln (1988) suggested that this flexibility was characteristic of an open system of inquiry in which outside data may be considered, and there may be a lack of elegance when adjusting for the consideration of new data. Efforts to mask the identity of participants and their businesses allowed for the positive development of rapport and candid conversation. It was of the utmost importance that my Record of Study provides a platform for the employers' voice and perspective regardless of the timing or pre-determined protocol of the interaction.

A two-phase system of data analysis utilizes the expertise of both the participant and the researcher in developing and analyzing the data and demonstrates rigor in qualitative research (Gioia et al., 2012). The first-order coding and analysis happens concurrently with the completion of interviews. Initial codes and categories are created from the precise terms used by participants from their lived experiences. More than 50 first-order categories should be expected to develop, and the researcher is encouraged to "get lost" in the data (p. 20). I anticipated that interview respondents would have a fair amount of variance in their initial interview responses due to the differences in industry, years in business, and prior experiences in working with employees with disabilities. The use of a reflexive journal recorded my initial considerations and impressions of the data. In using this first-order coding and analysis, the data directed the progress of the research, and documentation in the reflexive journal assisted in substantiating the

connections made later. My study attempts to dispel some of the unknowns surrounding employer perceptions and treatment of individuals with disabilities in small, local businesses.

In the second phase of coding and analysis, the researcher aimed to answer the question: "What is going on here" (Gioia et al., 2012). While 'getting lost' in the first phase of the data analysis, I must "focus concepts and tentative relationships" from the data in the second stage (p. 20). This phase of analysis considers the theoretical underpinnings of the initial phase of analysis. At this point in my study, I had the flexibility to return to an interview participant and ask questions related to the direction in which the research is culminating.

A crucial step in this second stage of data analysis is the creation of a data structure. The data structure is "a static picture of a dynamic phenomenon" (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 22). This data structure allows for a visual model connecting the lived experiences of participants to the categories and then to theoretical constructs emerging from the data. This model illustrates the concepts and themes, as well as the interrelationships involving those themes and concepts. It is from this data structure that Grounded Theory can then be articulated. In using this method of data analysis, this study reports actual factors and relationships that impact the viewpoints of employers and, by extension, the employment experiences of individuals with disabilities.

Timeline

In previous program years, students in the transition program began internships during the spring semester (February-June). Interns work at their internship site weekly for approximately 2-4 hours per week and have the support of a transition program staff person. The business owner supervises and directs the intern, and the program staff coordinates transportation, scheduling, individual concerns, and remains present at the worksite for insurance and liability purposes.

Study data was collected during the fall semester following the spring in which transition students interned at the participating business. Data collection was completed prior to the start date of any student internships for the 2020-2021 school year. Each participant in the study followed the timeline indicated in Table 2. Initial coding and analysis of interview data, as well as memos created within the researcher's journal, informed the need for a second interview with participants. Upon completion of member checking for each participant, secondary coding and analysis was used to create the previously mentioned data structure.

Table 2

Timeline of Data Collection

Approximate Date of Completion	**Means of Data Collection**	**Individuals Involved**
Week 1	Interview 1	Researcher and study Participant
Week 2	Interview 2 and/or Member Checking	Researcher and study Participant

Reliability and Validity Equivalents

In this qualitative study, reliability and validity measures are embedded in the methods chosen and the approach to analysis. Trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility establish rigor in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2014). Both Gioia et al. (2012) and Patton (2015) suggested that trustworthiness and authenticity can be conveyed via the stance of an investigative journalist reporting on differing perspectives. In this way, researchers are open to the perspectives that each participant reveals, and I engaged with each participant to capture their unique perspective. The

raw data of the interviews was transcribed verbatim, and initial coding was based on the constructs present in the data.

To further demonstrate credibility, I disclosed my background and biases, as well as any emergent ideas, connections, and categories within the reflective journal. Trainor and Graue (2014) urged qualitative researchers to seek a balance between reflexivity and the narrative of the "participants' voices" (p. 272). The results of this study are reported, using direct quotes from participants and thick descriptions that illustrate the connections from raw data to themes, categories, and theory grounded in the data.

Closing Thoughts on Chapter III

The use of a qualitative approach resulted in detailed, thick descriptions of the small business owners and their attitudes, affect, and behaviors toward employing individuals with disabilities. My study gathered data through a series of interviews. This data was then be coded, and a reflexive journal documented the impressions, insights, and rationale for the coding, in alignment with the constant comparison method. The Gioia methodology influenced the coding and analysis process, which culminated in a data structure. Illustration of the Grounded Theory of the constructs and their interrelationships are visible in the data structure

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data for this qualitative study examining employer perceptions of individuals with disabilities was analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) coupled with the Gioia method (Gioia, 2012). Participant interviews took place during the months of September and October 2020 and were scheduled around the availability of each participant. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing measures, as well as uncontrolled wildfires in the area, some of the second interviews took place more than a week following the initial interview. Reflective journal entries were composed following each interview and upon the completion of each interview transcript to document researcher reflexivity (Patton, 2015). These journal entries prompted the inclusion of new questions to the interview protocol for the second interview as well as questions to clarify comments or terms from the first interview. Additional reflective journal entries frequently followed developments in the coding of data. First order coding began following the completion of interviews in September 2020, and data analysis was completed in November 2020 by hand with the use of Google Sheets and Lucidcharts.

Presentation of Data

This study sought to identify factors impacting the attitudes of employers in hiring individuals with disabilities and to identify programmatic approaches that impact the attitudes of employers in hiring individuals with disabilities. The results of this study will be presented to district leadership and integrated into the curriculum and programming of the Walls School District Transition Program for students ages 18-21. Participant responses were transcribed, coded, and emergent themes and patterns were identified.

Current community partners with the school district were recruited from a variety of industries and each participant held a position that determined hiring and training of new

employees. The demographics of the study participants can be found in Table 3. This study included an equal number of male and female participants. Except for one participant, all the interviewees had previously served as internship supervisors for students with disabilities. The one participant who had not facilitated an internship, had experience hiring individuals with disabilities for paid positions within his company but did not have any affiliation with trade schools or transition programs. All the participants played a role in the training of new employees, with the exception of the one participant who did not have a history of hiring employees for her business. This participant did have experience training several interns as part of her partnership with school district transition programs. More than half of the participants had personal or familial experiences with disabilities. Two of the six participants were required to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) based on the number of employees within the business. Two participants did not have experience hiring individuals with disabilities for competitive employment within their business, but one of these participants did have prior experience assisting customers with disabilities. Two participants were able to identify specific company policies related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and a third participant was unsure of the policy but certain that it could be found within the Human Resources portal for the company.

Table 3

Demographics of Participants

Participant	1960	1974	1983	1999	2008	2017
Type of company	Non-profit	Assisted Living Facility	Children's Consignment Store	Electrical Contractor	Floral/ Gift Shop	New Car Automotive Dealership (Parts & Service Dept.)
Industry	Accommodation and Food Service	Healthcare and Social Assistance	Retail Trade	Construction	Retail Trade	Automotive
Total number of Employees	1	42	2	7	0	1000 (30)
Number of locations	5,000+	1	1	1	1	8 (2)
Recruitment	search engines, word of mouth	search engines, employee referral program, word of mouth	local mom's group, word of mouth	referrals	none	Search engines, employee referral program, word of mouth,
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy within the company	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Unknown
Previous experience hiring Individuals with disabilities	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Unknown
Previous experience as an internship site for individuals with disabilities	Yes, 1 previous intern	Yes, 3 previous interns	Yes, 2 previous interns	No	Yes, 3 previous interns	Yes, 8 previous interns
Title of participant	Program Manager	Executive Director	Owner	President/ Owner	Owner	Parts & Service Director
Participant's role in training employees	Train kitchen staff volunteers	Follow-up after manager provides training	Only trainer	Matches new employee with a trainer	N/A	Coordinates general onboarding process; trainer of tasks for specific roles
Personal Experience(s) with disabilities	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Data collected from participant transcripts was analyzed using both in vivo codes and code mapping. First order coding was completed using in vivo codes in an attempt to capture the lived experiences of the participants (Gioia, 2012) and as recommended for use with grounded

theory (Saldana, 2016). With the use of in vivo coding, words and phrases that "call for bolding, underlining, italicizing, highlighting or vocal emphasis if spoken aloud" were identified as data units (Saldana, 2016, p. 107).

Following first order coding, code mapping (Saldana, 2016), provided a means to organize the individual units into specific codes. The result of the first iteration of code mapping resulted in 38 codes. A second iteration of code mapping involved broadening code descriptors and the number of codes reduced to 26. For example, code descriptors that were initially "duties in the business" and "integration into the business" were combined into a broader code of "interns within the business". The 26 codes and data segments were then compared to the identified research questions and a third iteration of code mapping collapsed the number of codes to 11. Data segments that did not support or refute the research questions were eliminated and the existing data units were reorganized into codes that more directly reflected the contents. For example, participant quotes were removed from the code of "real world" and the remaining data segments were added the emergent code of "impressions from the internship experience". The resulting eleven codes were grouped into three categories: supervisory factors, employment attributes and opportunities, and programmatic attributes and approaches.

The category of *Supervisory Factors* contains three codes and pertains to the self-reflected identity of the participant, prior professional experiences, and the personal attributes that the hiring manager brings to the decision about hiring employees with disabilities. The language the participant used to describe their role within the business speaks to the management style of the participant. "To hire and accept the applicant or employee" was how participant 1999 described himself, and he further explained that he "end[s] up playing the father figure." Participant 1974 stated, "I'm the one asking, hey how are you feeling?" Prior professional

experiences ranged from responses of “It’s never come up” (Participant 2017) to “I learned to use their abilities” (Participant 1999). In terms of the attributes, two participants self-disclosed disabilities. Participant 1974 stated “I’m dyslexic” and participant 2008 asserted, “I [sic] got numeric dyslexia”. Participant 2017 stated, “my daughter . . . diagnosed with ADHD and anxiety disorder” in high school after years of struggling and that Special Education classes were “a degrading tool”.

The ways in which the participants viewed both the individual approach of the company, experiences with reasonable accommodations in the workplace, and the supports and inefficiencies that could be improved upon were collectively categorized as *Employment Attributes and Opportunities*. Individual approach of the company reflected the approach to on-boarding and training. Participant 1960 stated “you’ve got strengths and weaknesses with each individual” and participant 1983 asserted that training was “based on the individual themself [sic] and what they needed.” Views of reasonable accommodations were not dependent upon those participants who were required to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). Participant 1999 shared a need to “accommodate that barrier (color blindness) by labeling wires with letters and numbers” despite being a business that is not required to provide reasonable accommodations. Likewise, participant 2008’s business is not required to provide reasonable accommodations and clearly stated that they were “not necessary.” Supports available from the business included a “thorough HR Portal” (Participant 2017) and an “outside consultant” who is helping with the diversity initiative (Participant 1960). All of the participants agreed that inefficiencies existed within their business, and participant 1974 stated, “I could tailor a job description for one person to do something. . .that would make our everything else run more smoothly.”

The third category of data labeled *Programmatic Attributes and Approaches* consists of five codes: employability of people with disabilities, impressions from the internship experience, interns within the business, working with staff, and job coaching and supports. These codes consider the beliefs of the employer, the impressions based on experiences working with interns with disabilities, the impact program staff had on the internship experience, and the identification of needed supports to more fully integrate an individual with disabilities into the business. Reflective journal entries considered several misalignments and 'otherness' within participant statements that are coded within this category. For example, participant 1960 reflected upon his experiences with a specific volunteer with disabilities in saying that it's "really interesting. . . after a short period of time. . . I don't see the disability." This participant also commented that he was "amazed at his [volunteer with disabilities] like job performance . . . what he did with one arm." An additional example was when participant 1974 stated "every single one of them [transition program interns] is employable" and also emphasized the importance of young people with disabilities being "out to the real world, into us, who aren't necessarily used to having people living with disabilities in our world." Because of this inherent link between responses about the employability of people with disabilities and the impressions from the internship experience, both codes were categorized within *Programmatic Approaches and Attributes*.

Codes within this category contain greater variation than codes within the prior two categories. Responses surrounding the employability of people with disabilities varied from the generally supportive idea that "everyone should have a chance in the workforce" (Participant 1983) to skill-focused concepts of "show up to work and be reliable" (Participant 2017) and "have the desire to learn" (Participant 1999). Participant impressions of their experiences with interns with disabilities involved the costs or benefits associated with providing internships "I

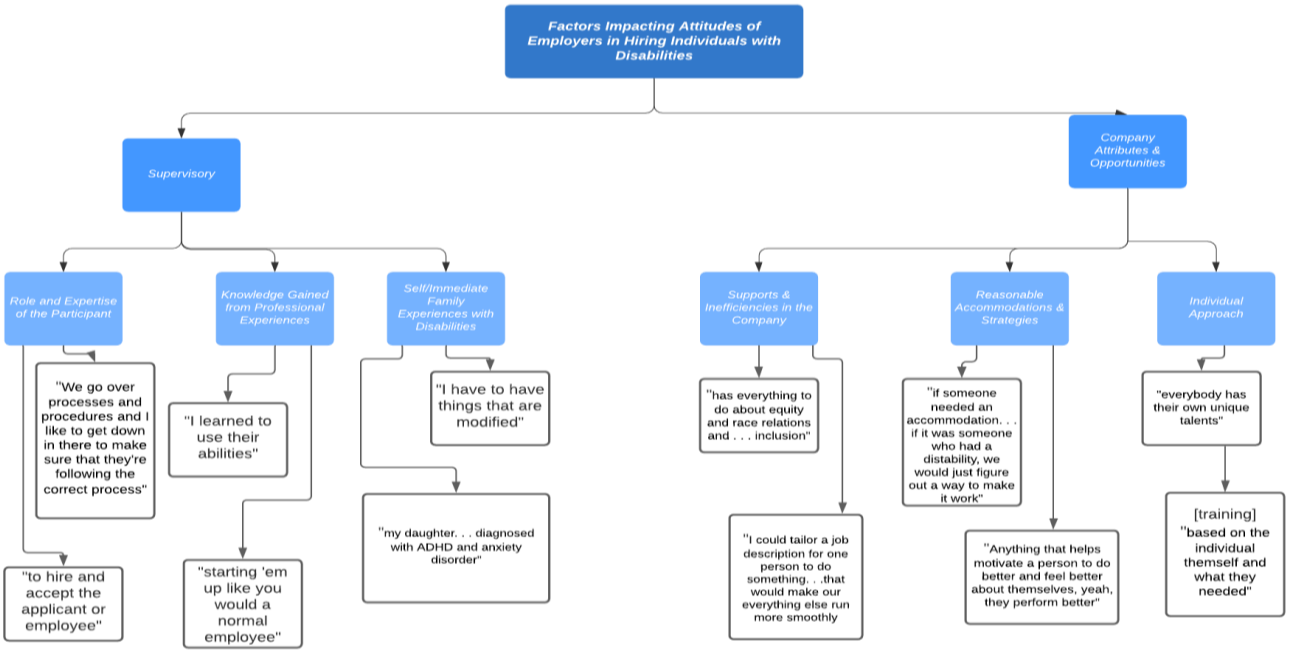
don't have enough to support it. . . financially" (Participant 1999) as well as "It's a good one to have [internships] because so many of them don't have that opportunity and a lot of 'em get forgotten about" (Participant 2008). Interns within the business were viewed as completing "mundane tasks" (Participant 1974), providing "emotional support" and contributing to the atmosphere of the workplace in that "from a community standpoint. . . the kids are a big part of that" (Participant 1960). Following a pregnant pause of nearly ten seconds in the interview, Participant 1983 shared that the interns were "slightly helpful" and clarified that the work the interns completed "didn't bring a huge value to what we do, but it didn't bring no value, either."

Greater consensus could be found in the responses of participants in relation to working with program staff and the role of job coaches and other supports for employees with disabilities. Participants viewed their work with staff as a "symbiotic relationship" (Participant 1960) and described how they "were all working together" within the shop (Participant 2008). Participant 1983 described how staff were "helpful in explaining the needs of the individual" and Participant 1974 added that staff were "helpful on how to interact with somebody or . . .what tones or what body language might not work well for somebody." While the program staff were generally viewed as helpful, participants repeatedly emphasized that job coaches and other supports would be beneficial during training or when adding additional duties. Participant 1960 suggested a need for "additional support to kinda get them transitioned into that job", and participant 1999 clarified that a job coach would be beneficial "just as the skills are being taught." The greatest variation from these sentiments came from Participant 2017 who stated, "I think the best thing is for the human resources to get involved" when asked if job coaches or outside supports would be beneficial to employees with disabilities.

Further analysis of the categories involved evaluating ways in which the data addressed the research questions in this study. As Gioia (2012) recommended, a data structure was created based on the in vivo coding and the concept mapping. Chart 1 identifies the two categories and six codes that support research question 1: What factors impact the attitudes of employers in hiring individuals with disabilities? The in vivo codes included in the data structure were selected based on their ability to represent the recurring sentiments found within the individual code. Reflective journal entries tracked the considerations in selecting the individual data segments ensured equitable representation from all participants and included variations in the participant responses where those existed.

Chart 1

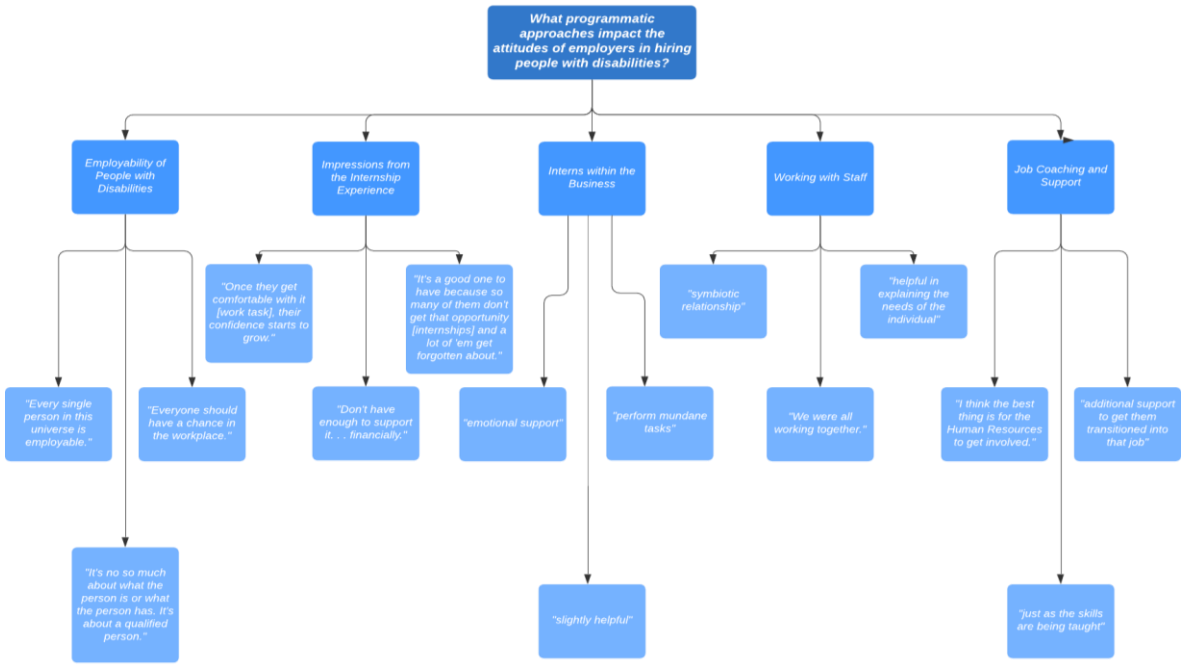
Data Structure for Research Question 1



Following a similar process as outline for the first research question for this study, the in vivo codes and code mapping were used to construct a second data structure. A second data structure was created to determine what data addressed the second research question of this study: What programmatic approaches impact the attitudes of employers in hiring individuals with disabilities? Chart 2 illustrates the resulting data structure for this research question. Several reflective journal entries considered the appropriateness of the code for employability of people with disabilities for either data structure or both data structures. The final determination in aligning that particular code with Programmatic Attributes and Approaches and the second research question arose from the consideration that the other codes within this category are linked to knowledge and experience that the transition program provides to community partners.

Chart 2

Data Structure for Research Question 2



Results

The qualitative data collected and analyzed in this study suggests that factors impacting the attitudes of employers in hiring individuals with disabilities includes both supervisory knowledge, expertise, and experience as well as company attributes and opportunities. The data in this study also suggests that programmatic approaches that impact the attitudes of employers in hiring individuals with disabilities include: fostering of beliefs about the employability of individuals with disabilities; an internship experience that demonstrates the value the individual brings to the business; program staff who provide information, strategies, and resources to prepare employers to hire the intern upon completion of the internship; and temporary support for the employee with disabilities during the initial training process. These factors implicate the need for multiple stakeholders to be involved in programmatic changes to the Walls School District transition program. Improvements are also warranted in how student participants are prepared to self-advocate in the workplace and in how program staff interact and strategically provide resources to community partners.

Interaction with Context of the Study

Walls School District continued to be supportive of this study throughout the process. The initial approval letter provided by the district identified community partners that had elected not to participate in the study, and the district office representative was cordial enough to approve contacting additional community partners to recruit for this study. The district initiated a strategic plan to address systemic equity and inclusion challenges within the district during the 2020-2021 school year. This research study aligned with the importance of evaluating the district's role in supporting successful student outcomes for all students across all programs.

Study participants positively responded the outreach for recruitment as it provided an opportunity to communicate about the status of both the transition program and the business during the uncertain times of state-mandated closures and social distancing measures. Some of the participants experienced busier than typical periods during this time, due to the nature of their business, and other participants expressed concern regarding the future of their business. One transition program community partner agreed to participate and then withdrew consent when the wildfires in the area increased business to house families evacuating from effected areas. Participants who completed the study interviews demonstrated an ease in responding through moments of laughter, honesty that was not flattering to the transition program, inquiries into the researcher's progress with the study, and inquiries regarding the return of interns to community worksites.

There are plans for various district stakeholders to review the findings of this study. The Special Education Director for the district has supported the development and refinement of programming within the Walls School District Transition Program. The importance of transition program students obtaining competitive employment is not only significant for the student's quality of life but is a metric the school district must report to the state governing agency. Insights gained from this study will prompt: the drafting of more explicit and comprehensive self-advocacy lessons for students receiving Special Education services within the district; more purposeful and targeted partnerships with community businesses; and generate a new job description and training for staff members supporting the transition program.

Summary

The results of this study suggest that supervisory history and company attributes and opportunities are factors impacting an employer's attitude about hiring individuals with disabilities. In addition, programmatic approaches that can impact the attitudes of employers in hiring individuals with disabilities include beliefs about employability of people with disabilities, internships experiences, contributions of interns to the business, interactions with program staff, and the availability of job coaches or supports for initial training of employees with disabilities. Implications of this study impact not only the quality of life of transition program participants but also additional training for program staff and targeted supports for community partners.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

School districts are compelled to create community networks that support career exploration and employment experiences for young adults with disabilities. Indicator 14 of IDEA (2004) holds districts accountable for the progression of students into college, vocational programs or employment. Improvements in employment outcomes depend upon actions within local communities (Carter et al., 2016). The resulting collaborative networks of school personnel and employers persist in efforts to expand competitive employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in rural communities (Bumble et al., 2017). This qualitative study aimed to add clarity to the work being done by one rural community to improve the employment outcomes for students participating in Walls School District transition program. The second goal was to identify adjustments that may improve collaborative efforts with local businesses.

To guide the efforts and further understand demand-side factors, two research questions were posed for this study. The first research question was: What factors impact the attitudes of employers in hiring individuals with disabilities? Supervisory knowledge, expertise, and experience as well as company attributes and opportunities factored into the attitudes of study participants when considering the hiring of individuals with disabilities. The second research question was: What programmatic approaches impact the attitudes of employers in hiring individuals with disabilities? Participant responses indicated that factors included: fostering of beliefs about the employability of individuals with disabilities; an internship experience that demonstrates the value the individual brings to the business; program staff who provide information, strategies, and resources to prepare employers to hire the intern upon completion of the internship; and support for the employee with disabilities during the initial training process.

These findings suggest a strategic role of transition program staff in fostering positive experiences and interactions, as well as increasing the community partner's capacity to expand the knowledgebase of internship supervisors. In addition, a more targeted curriculum that emphasizes self-awareness and self-advocacy to prepare and train young adults participating in the transition program for the supports provided through the ADA. Participant's responses also reveal that small business owners would benefit from informational resources regarding the ADA, particularly in the area of reasonable accommodations which would provide foundational knowledge that could support fostering greater inclusion within the small business.

Discussion of Results in Relation to the Extant Literature or Theories

Results of this study extend the body of literature in the growing area of demand-side factors of employment for individuals with disabilities. Those participants who conveyed that they felt their role was to "play to a person's strengths" (Participant 1974) and adjust duties to fit the needs of both the employee and the business were also the same participants who hired individuals with disabilities in the past. The strengths-based focus expressed by several participants in this study coincides with the strategies identified in the community conversations of Bumble et al. (2017). The trend in this Record of Study also aligned with the findings of McDonnall et al. (2015) who identified prior experience in hiring a person who was blind or visually impaired as a predictor of future hiring of individuals with visual impairments, and with Kosyluk et al. (2014) concluding that if an employer begins with a positive hiring experience of a worker with a disability this could positively impact future hiring of individuals with disabilities. For this Record of Study, a participant's (employer) personal experience having a disability or an immediate family member having a disability did not necessarily mean the

participant hired individuals with disabilities or accommodated the interns with disabilities in the workplace.

In addition to positive workplace experiences for student interns and community partners, this study reinforces the literature in identifying a need for additional informational resources and inclusion of supports for employers. Iwanaga et al. (2018) emphasized disability inclusion preparedness to include training in the area of ADA job accommodations. Participant responses in this study indicated a lack of familiarity in general (Participants 1983 and 1999) or familiarity with the physical accessibility requirements of ADA (Participants 1960 and 1974). Supportive discussions during the internship experience around the topics of inclusion and reasonable accommodations support the conclusions of Kocman et al. (2017) in that perceived barriers to employment are often based on a lack of information and awareness of available resources.

Empowering the individual with disabilities through training in self-awareness and self-advocacy serves an avenue identified for programmatic improvement and is supported by existing literature. Butterworth et al. (2017) identified advocacy as a key component to bridge transition program activities and competitive employment outcomes. Self-advocacy prompts demand-side considerations in the areas of reasonable accommodations as well as to identify employee skills that are profitable for the company (Lindsay et al., 2018). An explicit, structured curriculum in self-determination attributes, such as self-awareness and self-advocacy, has been positively correlated with postsecondary employment outcomes and has been identified as one of the best research-based practices to support attainment of competitive employment (Cantley et al., 2010; National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, 2019; Shogren et al., 2018).

Discussion of Personal Lessons Learned

There are several lessons learned while completing this Record of Study. Aspects of those lessons were not only vital to the forward progress of this research project, but are applicable to project management skills, team collaboration and coordination, and personal resiliency in my professional and private life. The lessons learned from this journey ultimately culminated in knowledge, skills, and experiences that I had not anticipated.

In completing this Record of Study, during a world-wide pandemic and a summer of record-breaking West Coast wildfires, I gained the objectivity needed to troubleshoot changes to my carefully outlined focus and methodology of this study. The hardest lesson I learned was having to postpone and re-configure the timeline of the study. The understanding and support of advisors, my chairs, and the university IRB liaison guided the changes to sustain the progress of this project. I gained flexibility throughout the data collection phase of the study, and I honed my reflexivity skills using the reflective journal throughout the data collection process.

This reflective process prompted my increased awareness of the value in social networking, team collaboration, and how to more effectively facilitate partnerships. Where I previously took an 'all-business' approach to working with the businesses who partner with the transition program, responses in their interviews highlight the camaraderie that is beneficial to build trust within the partnership and provide relief to business partner stressors. The interest and support that community partners provided to me during the data collection process also infused much need encouragement to complete the study for everyone with a vested interest. This encouragement extended beyond the results of the research to a genuine commitment to improving outcomes for the young adults involved in the transition program.

Implications for Practice

Demand-side factors that impact the hiring of people with disabilities implicate the collaboration of multiple stakeholders. The outcomes of this Record of Study suggest that transition program staff, individuals with disabilities, and community partners play equitably important roles in improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. A focus on resources and education of business owners in this rural community would be insufficient in addressing the multi-layered needs of this problem of practice. To provide a comprehensive response to the challenges individuals with disabilities face in obtaining competitive employment, a three-pronged strategy is advised.

The first component of this strategy is to address the job description of the transition program staff who support students in the community through a job coach role. Participant responses suggest a benefit to having transition program staff support initial worksite training for individuals with disabilities who are transitioning from an unpaid internship to a paid employment role. In addition, participants highlighted the role transition program staff play in identifying employer strategies and approaches. The current job description and pay scale of the support staff in the Walls School District Transition Program staff are identical to the instructional support staff who provide inclusion support in the high school classrooms. The skills set and demands of the transition program staff are more highly specialized and require greater latitude for independent decision-making, than that of classroom instructional support staff. Data from this study suggests that the role of transition program staff is that of role-model, facilitator of employer training, and guide to greater independence for the program participant. Educational Service Districts and state agencies staff positions with similar roles, and the job descriptions for their positions can be used as a guide in revising the job description and pay

scale of Walls School District Transition Program staff members. Appendix D provides a composite example of a revised job description for staff members in the transition program. The adjustments to the job description and pay scale directly impacts the expectations and role of the staff members of the program. The staff selected for these roles will have prior experiences in building partnerships within the community, as well as previous work with individuals with disabilities. This shift allows for greater efficiency and effectiveness in conveying information, resources, and inclusion strategies to partnering businesses.

The second component of this approach involves a strategic, explicit curriculum that is added to the transition program coursework to foster greater self-awareness and self-advocacy. Participants in this study acknowledged their lack of understanding of disabilities and accommodations. Self-awareness and self-advocacy empower the individual with disabilities to directly promote their strengths, skills, and contributions to a business. Self-advocacy skills also provide the individual with the knowledge and language to make requests for accommodations that are within their rights. Several research-based curricula exist in the literature today. The National Technical Assistance Center for Transition (2019) recommends "Whose Future Is It Anyway?" to teach self-determination skills. The lessons in this curriculum are research-based and are applicable to both the development of Individual Education Plans while the student is in public school and when an individual enters the workforce. An additional program developed by Cantley et al. (2010) entitled "ME!" specifically focuses on self-awareness and self-advocacy skills that can be generalized to multiple situations and environments. Both programs have detailed lesson plans, presentation slides, and additional resources for the teacher and families.

During the fall semester of the school year, students could complete a focused curriculum addressing self-awareness and self-advocacy to prepare for volunteer and internship experiences

beginning in the spring. The fall semester would also provide an opportunity to engage local businesses in community conversations about improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities in the local area. Spring community-based pre-employment activities would then provide authentic opportunities for students to apply self-awareness and self-advocacy skills. The spring semester would also offer employers an opportunity to gain the initial positive employment experience that can positively impact future hiring considerations for individuals with disabilities.

The final component of this strategy is a directed, intentional series of community conversations throughout the school year to discuss employment of individuals with disabilities. This practical aspect can be accomplished in multiple ways. The transition program has an existing Family Forum program to connect families with service agencies and resources. The goals of this monthly program could be expanded to include a community awareness component and community partners could be involved in the conversation with program participants, families, and agency providers. This component could also be folded into the activities that the district has planned to address the equity initiative that is the focus of the district's strategic plan. There are several documentaries that could be viewed within the community to provide a catalyst for conversation around equity and inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the workforce of this small, rural community.

Connect to Context

The research involved in preparing the proposal for this Record of Study provided a significant contribution to the professional development of current transition program staff and led to the creation of a professional development workshop that was presented during Disability Awareness Month (October 2020) at each campus within the Walls School District. Feedback

from campus staff members who attended the professional development expressed an eagerness to support their students toward positive employment outcomes and requested that the district provide additional professional development opportunities to this end.

Throughout this research experience, I have been able to provide research and resources to leaders at the district level. Leadership has acknowledged the need to improve employment outcomes for students with disabilities and has taken concrete steps to utilize the results of this study within the district. In September 2020, I met with the Superintendent and two Assistant Superintendents to discuss the focus of my Record of Study and how the results could be integrated into the district's strategic plan. In November 2020, I met with the Director of Special Education to create an initial timeline for the community conversations that the district will host throughout the coming year. Appendix C is the one-page proposal of the initial activity to promote community conversations using a documentary for initial momentum. In addition to the plans being made at the district level, at the campus-level there have been efforts to expand the professional repertoire of staff at the high school. Case managers are demonstrating greater awareness and effort through transition planning and self-advocacy efforts prior to a student's graduation.

Connect to Field of Study

This qualitative study contributes to the growing literature exploring demand-side employment strategies that positively impact employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Specifically, this research contributes to the breadth of knowledge in regard to small, rural businesses that are not obligated to comply with federal ADA regulations. Through greater networking and support, employers in rural communities can gain insight and expertise from the local school district that promotes hiring and continued employment for individuals with

disabilities. While this study is not intended to be generalized to other situations, it does support existing literature in the field and suggests practical means of addressing a problem of practice that exists in many small communities and school districts.

This study also adds to an emerging field of human research that has adapted to the virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to social distancing measures and public health restrictions, the inability to congregate or utilize public spaces in the typical manner have prompted changes to research methodology that involves video conferencing in lieu of in-person interviews and the exchange of consent documents by electronic means. These shifts in protocol raise questions regarding confidentiality, anonymity, and authenticity. This Record of Study has taken precautions to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, as well to confirm the authenticity of the signed informed consent for this study. The changes in methodology also provide for unanticipated opportunities to review body language, to calculate duration of a pause to respond, and increase the availability of participants to complete interviews at a time and place of their complete discretion.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the completion of this Record of Study, there were moments that provided insight into this problem of practice and there were moments of realization that any follow-up study needed aspects not included in this study. Participant responses were complex and multi-dimensional. The initial reactions immediately following participant interviews were captured in my journal. In many instances the initial entry consisted of more questions than statements. When recording impressions following the transcription of the same interview, the fervor of the moment had subsided, and the entry consisted of more probing questions and wandering about the connection between one statement and another. The value added through the reflection

process contained within the researcher's journal provided immense insight for a beginning researcher.

If I were to replicate this study once community-based instruction and activities are no longer prohibited, I would utilize a mixed-method research design. The semi-structured interviews would remain in the design, and I would extend the interviews to include transition program staff. Gaining the perspective of the staff members could enrich and perhaps inform the interviews with the community partners. In the new design, I would include a quantitative tool in which community partners could rate or record their impressions immediately after working with a transition program intern. In this way, real-time data could be collected that would include a variety of instances rather than reliance on the memory of participants and their generalized impressions of working with individuals with disabilities. This quantitative strand of the research could also document changes in employer perceptions over time working with an intern with disabilities.

Recommendations

The results of this Record of Study suggest a need for further inquiry into the demand-side factors impacting an employer's hiring of individuals with disabilities. This study utilized convenience sampling of existing community partners with the Walls School District. This sampling method benefitted from the familiarity of the researcher with the community partner, but it also means that participants were inherently more likely to have positive impressions of the employability of individuals with disabilities than a small business owner who has not previously partnered with the transition program. For further studies, it is recommended that recruitment include a more random sampling of small business owners. The transition program has approached small businesses within the local community, and the representative of the program

has been immediately rebuffed when mentioning providing internships or eventual hiring of the intern with disabilities. Greater insight into what factors play a role in this decision could be beneficial to this problem of practice.

Subsequent qualitative studies would benefit from collaboration with the school district's planned community engagement activities. Data collection during the community conversations that are scheduled for the next year would provide opportunities to gain the perspectives of stakeholders who may hold multiple roles within the community and to gather responses from business owners who express differing beliefs about the employability of individuals with disabilities. The variety of viewpoints could provide greater differentiation as to the strategies or approaches that may be effective for different subgroups of the community's business leaders. In recording the rationale of the business leaders, potential solutions to the challenges of competitive employment for individuals with disabilities could be developed through the suggestions of those most likely to implement them.

Closing Thoughts

Persistent underemployment and unemployment of individuals with disabilities impacts the individual's quality of life. People with disabilities who live in rural areas face additional obstacles to employment and fewer opportunities for employment. Federal regulations and incentives have minimally addressed these employment challenges. A deficit-remediation focus on the supply-side has shown to be insufficient in providing positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Collaboration and networking at the local level provides promise in addressing this chronic social problem. The aim of this study was to explore the demand-side factors that impact an employer's attitude toward hiring an individual with disabilities and to examine programmatic approaches that the local school district's transition program could used

to improve employment outcomes for students receiving Special Education services. Most participants were owners and managers of small business who are not obligated to comply with the federal guidelines meant to benefit employees with disabilities.

In the existing literature, a clear disconnect is noted between the beliefs of employers and their actual hiring practices. Respondents in this study were frank about their personal beliefs, the limitations of their business, and the extent of their knowledge in how to interact with someone with a disability. The results of this study suggest that any disconnect between beliefs and hiring practice is mitigated by a convergence of multiple factors. This is not a social problem or problem of practice that has a clear solution by means of one process. Because of the complex nature these interactions, multiple stakeholders must be included in addressing the employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities from multiple perspectives.

A benefit of addressing the employment challenge from multiple directions is that each plays a key role in minimizing the perceived obstacles of employing individuals with disabilities. Employers and small business owners need further resources and information to build their expertise in the area of reasonable accommodations and an ability model of hiring individuals with disabilities. With this increased expertise, fear of the unknown will be minimized. Job coaches are needed to support employers and employees with disabilities during the initial periods of training to ensure long-term success and a positive employment experience for the employer. The additional support while learning new roles or responsibilities minimizes the impact of perceptions that underestimate the knowledge, skills, and abilities of an employee with disabilities. Active and effective self-advocacy provides an individual with disabilities the means to express the extent to which they can benefit the company and serves as a communicative tool

to request the supports necessary for optimal performance. Increased communication minimizes concerns about productivity and the potential for fear of litigation.

Public schools have a unique place at the intersection of these perspectives. Preparation for future employment and a community of learners are the core mission of many school districts. An innovate approach is necessary for a healthy quality of life for all community members and increase inclusivity of the workplace. Through a community network of partnerships, conscientious programing and staffing of transition services, and a targeted curriculum that adequately prepares students for independent adult living, improvements in employment outcomes are possible at the local level.

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APPENDIX A

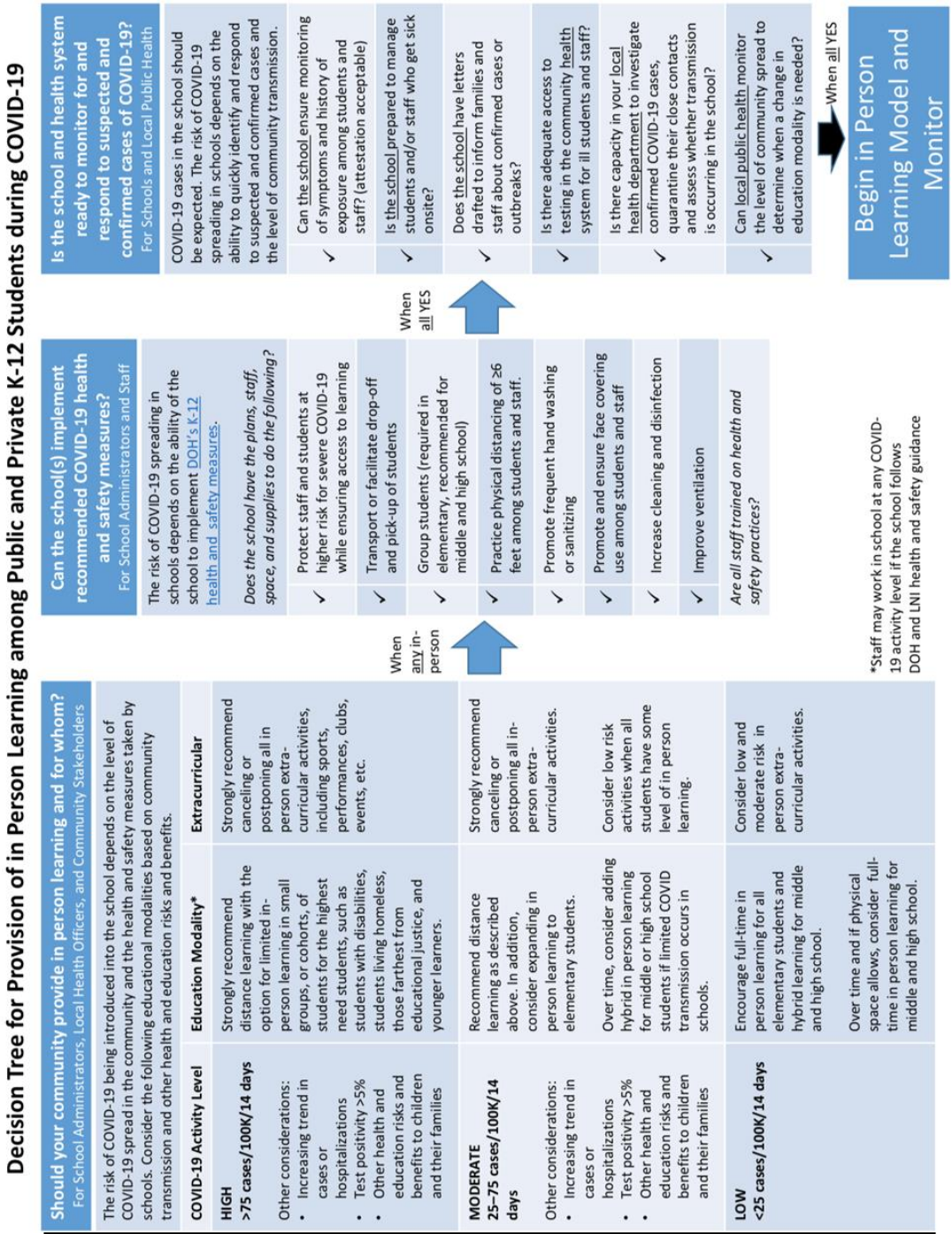
IDEA Part B Indicators

1	Percent of youth with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) graduating from high school with a regular diploma
2	Percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school
3	Participation and performance of children with IEPs on statewide assessments
4	Rates of suspension and expulsion
5	Percent of children with IEPs aged 6 to 21 who are served: a) inside the regular classroom 80% or more of the day; b) inside the regular classroom less than 40% of the day; c) in separate schools, residential facilities, hospital/homebound placements
6	Percent of children aged 3 to 5 with IEPs attending: a) regular early childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program; and b) a separate special education class, separate school, or residential facility
7	Percent of preschool children aged 3 to 5 with IEPs who demonstrate improved: a) positive social-emotional skills; b) acquisition and use of knowledge and skills; c) use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs
8	Percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parental involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities
9	Percent of districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education and related services that is a result of inappropriate identification
10	Percent of districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in specific disabilities categories that is a result of inappropriate identification
11	Percent of children who were evaluated with 60 days of receiving parental consent for initial evaluation, or if the State establishes a timeframe in which the evaluation must be conducted, within that timeframe
12	Percent of children referred by Part C prior to age 3, who are found eligible for Part B, and who have an IEP developed and implemented by their third birthdays
13	Percent of youth with IEPs aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annually updated and based upon an age appropriate transition assessment, transition services, including courses of study, that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals related to the student's transition service needs. There must also be evidence that the student was invited to the IEP team meeting where transition services are to be discussed and evidence that , if appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority.
14	Percent of you who are no longer in secondary school, who had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and were: a)enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school; b) enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school; c) enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary

	education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.
15	General supervision system identifies and corrects noncompliance as soon as possible but in no case later than one year from identification
16	Percent of signed written complaints with reports issued that were resolved within 60-day timeline or a timeline extended for exceptional circumstances with respect to a particular complaint
17	Percent of fully adjudicated due process hearing requests that were fully adjudicated within the 45-day timeline or a timeline that is properly extended by the hearing officer at the request of either party.
18	Percent of hearing requests that went to resolution sessions that were resolved through resolution session settlement agreements
19	Percent of mediations held that resulted in mediation agreements
20	State reported data are timely and accurate
Note: from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 1416, (1990). https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/bapr/bmeatab2.pdf	

APPENDIX B

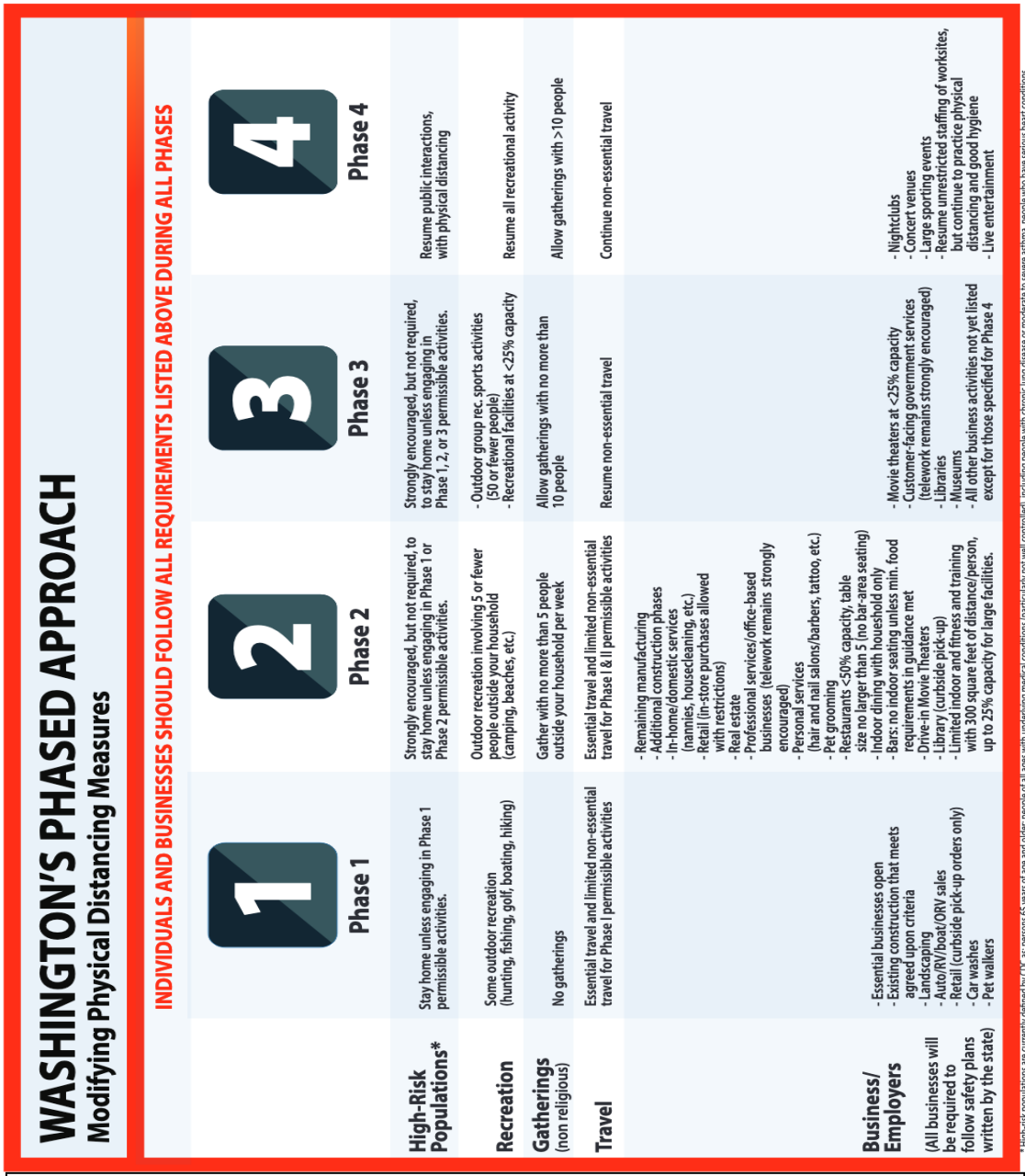
Recommendations from the Washington State Department of Health



Note: from the Washington State Department of Health (2020) https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/DecisionTree-K12schools.pdf

APPENDIX C

Washington Safe Start Phases for Reopening



WASHINGTON'S PHASED APPROACH

Modifying Physical Distancing Measures

INDIVIDUALS AND BUSINESSES SHOULD FOLLOW ALL REQUIREMENTS LISTED ABOVE DURING ALL PHASES

	1 Phase 1	2 Phase 2	3 Phase 3	4 Phase 4
High-Risk Populations*	Stay home unless engaging in Phase 1 permissible activities.	Strongly encouraged, but not required, to stay home unless engaging in Phase 1 or Phase 2 permissible activities.	Strongly encouraged, but not required, to stay home unless engaging in Phase 1, 2, or 3 permissible activities.	Resume public interactions, with physical distancing
Recreation	Some outdoor recreation (hunting, fishing, golf, boating, hiking)	Outdoor recreation involving 5 or fewer people outside your household (camping, beaches, etc.)	- Outdoor group rec. sports activities (50 or fewer people) - Recreational facilities at <25% capacity	Resume all recreational activity
Gatherings (non religious)	No gatherings	Gather with no more than 5 people outside your household per week	Allow gatherings with no more than 10 people	Allow gatherings with >10 people
Travel	Essential travel and limited non-essential travel for Phase 1 permissible activities	Essential travel and limited non-essential travel for Phase 1 & II permissible activities	Resume non-essential travel	Continue non-essential travel
Business/ Employers (All businesses will be required to follow safety plans written by the state)	- Essential businesses open - Existing construction that meets agreed upon criteria - Landscaping - Auto/RV/boat/ORV sales - Retail (curbside pick-up orders only) - Car washes - Pet walkers	- Remaining manufacturing - Additional construction phases - In-home/domestic services (nannies, housecleaning, etc.) - Retail (in-store purchases allowed with restrictions) - Real estate - Professional services/office-based businesses (telework remains strongly encouraged) - Personal services (hair and nail salons/barbers, tattoo, etc.) - Pet grooming - Restaurants <50% capacity, table size no larger than 5 (no bar-area seating) - Indoor dining with household only - Bars: no indoor seating unless min. food requirements in guidance met - Drive-in Movie Theaters - Library (curbside pick-up) - Limited indoor and fitness and training with 300 square feet of distance/person, up to 25% capacity for large facilities.	- Movie theaters at <25% capacity - Customer-facing government services (telework remains strongly encouraged) - Libraries - Museums - All other business activities not yet listed except for those specified for Phase 4	- Nightclubs - Concert venues - Large sporting events - Resume unrestricted staffing of worksites, but continue to practice physical distancing and good hygiene - Live entertainment

*High-risk populations are currently defined by CDC as: persons 65 years of age and older; people of all ages with underlying medical conditions (particularly not well controlled), including people with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma, people who have serious heart conditions, people who are immunocompromised, people with severe obesity, people with diabetes, people with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis, and people with liver disease; people who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility.

**For the purposes of the Safe Start Phased Plan, bars are defined as taverns, breweries, wineries and distilleries.

Note: from Governor Jay Inslee (2020) proclamation for "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" phased approach https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SafeStartWA_4May20_1pm.pdf

APPENDIX D

Walls School District Proposed Job Description

Walls Adult Transition Program
ParaProfessional/Transition Coach Position

General Description of the Position

The ParaProfessional/Transition Coach will, under the direction of the teacher, assist in providing instruction and support to the participants of the Walls Adult Transition Program. The ParaProfessional/Transition Coach will follow a schedule of duties assigned, which will include campus-based and community-based activities, instruction, behavior support, necessary clerical tasks, and personal care of students. The ParaProfessional/Transition Coach will follow all Walls SD policies and procedures, Walls Adult Transition Program policies and procedures, perform other duties as assigned, as well as collaborate and cooperate with students, other program staff, administrators, and community partners.

Essential Functions

1. Model physical tasks at worksites (i.e.spreading mulch, using a wheelbarrow, garbage pick-up, painting techniques, proper dishwashing procedures, deconstructing building materials, etc.)
2. Provide hands-on assistance in activities of daily living (ie. nail hygiene, cooking, washing clothes, etc.)
3. Adhere to a regular work schedule and complete the workday with attention to punctuality
4. Supervise assigned students at all times during the school day
5. Communicate clearly and effectively with all students, staff, and community partners
6. Provide and develop effective job coaching, employment plans and lesson plans
7. Excellent organizational and problem-solving ability
8. Provide support and encouragement to students when they are faced with unfamiliar or difficult tasks
9. Assess the strengths of individuals and teach them to use them effectively
10. Assist people with disabilities in developing social and life skills
11. Provide assistance between community partners and students and help them overcome their personal barriers and set goals
12. Advise on worksite accommodations for people with disabilities in developing social and life skills
13. Monitor and evaluate progress of clients
14. Keep records, take on-site photos, document and prepare appropriate reports
15. Working knowledge of MS Office and Google Suite

Additional Functions

1. Represent the Walls Transition Program in a professional manner while at off-campus worksites, using public transportation, area of businesses, and while in the building at WHS.
2. Monitor the hygiene needs/steps in completion of hygiene tasks (including showering, clothing, brushing teeth, and toileting)
3. Demonstrate flexibility with schedules that change daily and at times, throughout the day
4. Assist students with cover letters, applications, interview preparation, and public transportation schedules
5. Refrain from utilizing personal technology while in the classroom and on all community worksites
6. Provide coaching in effective job search techniques
7. Model a strong work ethic for students

Minimum Qualifications

1. Current valid driver's license on file with the District Office
2. Minimum AA or passing score on the ETS ParPro assessment state test

   *BSc/BA in Social Sciences or a related field preferred
3. Ability to operate and use technology for student instruction/care including computers, augmentative communication devices, adaptive physical equipment, and basic worksite equipment
4. Ability to produce materials using office equipment such as computers, copiers, printers, and audio/visual devices
5. The ability to work as a member of a collaborative a team
6. The ability to communicate (verbal and written) to perform the essential functions
7. Physical and mental attributes to perform the essential functions
8. Ability and willingness to care for students' personal care needs, including feeding, changing of clothes or adult briefs, and assistance with showering.

Working Conditions

1. Work environment varies from school setting, community, and outdoors (parks and hiking trails)
2. Work environment varies in weather related conditions
3. Transportation methods include school vans and public transportation (bus and train)
4. Exposure to bodily fluids and potentially infectious material/communicable diseases

Equipment Used

1. Cell Phone
2. School van
3. Adaptive Physical Equipment
4. Basic Power Tools/Building Tools

Physical Job Task Requirements

Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously
Not at all	Less than 1 hour or 1-5% per day	1.25 to 2 hours or 20-32% per day	2.25 to 4 hours or 36-64% per day	4.25-6.5 hours per day or 68-100% per day

The physical requirements checked are essential to performing the duties associated with this position.

1. Employee may need to:

Bend:	Rarely	Occasionally	☑ Frequently	Continuously
Climb:	☑ Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously
Crawl:	☑ Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously
Drive:	Rarely	Occasionally	☑ Frequently	Continuously
Kneel:	Rarely	☑ Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously
Reach above shoulder:	Rarely	☑ Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously
Reach forward:	Rarely	Occasionally	☑ Frequently	Continuously
Sit:	Rarely	☑ Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously
Squat:	Rarely	☑ Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously
Stand:	Rarely	Occasionally	☑ Frequently	Continuously
Twist:	Rarely	☑ Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously
Walk:	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	☑ Continuously
Run:	Rarely	☑ Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously
Stairs:	Rarely	Occasionally	☑ Frequently	Continuously
Lying down:	☑ Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously

2. Employees may use hands for:

Grasping:	Rarely	Occasionally	☑ Frequently	Continuously
Pinching:	☑ Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously
Finger manipulation:	Rarely	☑ Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously

3. Employee may use wrist for:

Twisting/turning:	Rarely	☑ Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously

4. Environmental Exposure:

Chemical contact:	Rarely	☑ Occasionally	Frequently	Continuously

Moving objects: Rarely Occasionally ☑ Frequently Continuously

Noise: Rarely Occasionally ☑ Frequently Continuously

Safety Equipment: Rarely Occasionally ☑ Frequently Continuously

Wetness: Rarely ☑ Occasionally Frequently Continuously

5. Sensory Requirements:

Vision: Rarely Occasionally Frequently ☑ Continuously

Hearing: Rarely Occasionally Frequently ☑ Continuously

Talking in person: Rarely Occasionally ☑ Frequently Continuously

Talking via phone: Rarely Occasionally ☑ Frequently Continuously

6. Pushing/Pulling

1-25 lbs. Rarely Occasionally ☑ Frequently Continuously
**utilizing a wheelbarrow; assisting with food bags, bins, and boxes; building supplies; donated clothing, household goods, and small appliances

26-50 lbs. Rarely ☑ Occasionally Frequently Continuously

7. Carrying

1-25 lbs. Rarely Occasionally ☑ Frequently Continuously
**Carrying supplies for worksites, food bags, bins, and boxes; building supplies, gardening supplies, etc.; Moving bins of food bags from volunteer site to van to school for delivery

26-50 lbs. Rarely ☑ Occasionally Frequently Continuously

8. Lifting

1-25 lbs. Rarely Occasionally ☑ Frequently Continuously
**Tables in the classroom for cleaning/special events; supporting students transitioning into/out of school van

26-50 lbs. Rarely ☑ Occasionally Frequently Continuously
**Removing or placing bins of clothing/shoes in Panther Den

APPENDIX E

Brief Proposal for Community Conversation Event

Hearts of Glass Viewing & Discussion Panel

Hearts of Glass follows the tumultuous first 15 months of operation of Vertical Harvest (VH), a multi-story, state-of-the-art hydroponic greenhouse that grows crops while providing meaningful, competitively-paid jobs for people with disabilities. The film weaves the story of VH's launch with the personal journeys of several employees with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Innovation and inclusion create a fertile environment for people and plants to grow.

VH is a vertical farm on 1/10 of an acre at an elevation of 6,237 feet in Jackson, Wyoming, a mountain town with extreme seasonal fluctuations in weather, population, and demand for goods and services. The employees with disabilities, part of an underestimated, underemployed and vulnerable population, are a vital and visible part of this community-based business.

Hearts of Glass is an intimate portrait of social entrepreneurship at the intersection of disability rights and sustainable, local food production. (from: https://www.jentenproductions.com/?viba_portfolio=hearts-of-glass)

Why: This film aligns with the strategic plan for WSD and the initiatives to address historical, systemic inequalities for the students we serve. The film highlights the innovative practices that result from collaboration and partnership to improve the community and the lives of the individuals with disabilities who live within it.

What: Copyright Permission, Marketing, Panel discussion, and Personalized Web-based Dashboard to access events. Social media and marketing support.

- Dashboard provides on-demand access to the film *Hearts of Glass* which is a 68-minute film following the development of a state-of-the-art hydroponics garden in Jackson Hole, WY that supports the equitable employment of individuals with and without disabilities.
- Dashboard includes WSD logo and URL contains the WSD name. It is used to register participants of the panel discussion webinar and provides access for viewers to submit questions to the panel.
- Marketing kit includes a personalized video of the producer promoting the event, banners and posts for social media accounts, and assistance for a 6-week promotional campaign for the event.
- Panel discussion can be tailored to local needs or focus (ie. self-advocacy, food justice/equity, innovative economic development, disability rights, etc.)
- Marketing kit includes a viewing guide with activities that can be used with district staff for professional development.
- This film has not been presented publicly in the State of Washington--EVER!

Cost: $3,000

When: June 1-11 viewing window, panel discussion June 8

- Dashboard would allow stakeholders and community members to register for the panel discussion and view the film on-demand during the viewing window. Panel discussion to be moderated and recorded by a selected WSD staff member.
- Panel to respond to submitted questions from the dashboard as well as those submitted through the chat feature of the webinar.
- Panel members will include the producer, 2 employees of Vertical Harvest, and 2 members selected by WSD.

APPENDIX F

Scope and Sequence: Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy Lessons

Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness & Self-Advocacy

Version 2.0

University of Oklahoma Zarrow Center for Learning Enrichment
Penny Cantley, Karen Little, James Martin, Ph.D.

Units & Lessons

UNIT 1: Getting Started

Lesson 1: Understanding Self-awareness & Self-advocacy

Lesson 2: Understanding What It's all About

UNIT 2: Learning About Special Education

Lesson 1: Learning About the History of Disability

Lesson 2: Learning About Special Education: How & why did I get here?

Lesson 3: Creating My History

UNIT 3: Understanding My Individualized Education Program

Lesson 1: Getting to Know My IEP

Lesson 2: Still Getting to Know My IEP

UNIT 4: Understanding My Rights and Responsibilities

Lesson 1: Learning About My Rights & Responsibilities in High School

Lesson 2: Learning About My Rights & Responsibilities After High School

Lesson 3: Where do I go from Here?

UNIT 5: Improving My Communication Skills

Lesson 1: Learning How to Communicate Effectively

Lesson 2: Knowing What to Share and Who to Share It With

UNIT 6: Increasing My Self-Awareness

Lesson 1: Starting My Self-Awareness Project

Lesson 2: Completing My Self-Awareness Project

Lesson 3: Presenting My Self-Awareness Project

UNIT 7: Advocating For My Needs in High School

Lesson 1: Planning How to Advocate

Lesson 2: Learning From Experience

UNIT 8: Advocating For My Needs After High School

Lesson 1: Using My New Skills on the Job

Lesson 2: Using My New Skills at Postsecondary School

Lesson 3: Reporting My Findings

UNIT 9: Developing My Resources

Lesson 1: Completing My Summary of Performance and Goals

UNIT 10: Assessing My Progress & Portfolio

Lesson 1: Assessing My Progress

Lesson 2: Assessing My Portfolio

APPENDIX G

Scope and Sequence: Self-Determination Lessons

Whose Future Is It Anyway? 2nd Edition
A Student-directed Transition Planning Process
By:
Michael Wehmeyer Margaret Lawrence Nancy Garner Jane Soukup Susan Palmer
Beach Center on Disability, KUCDD University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS

Section 1: Getting to Know You
- Session 1: The planning meeting
- Session 2: Choosing people to attend
- Session 3: Your preferences & interests
- Session 4: Disabilities
- Session 5: Your unique learning needs
- Session 6: Supports

Section 2: Making Decisions
- Session 7: Introduction to DO IT!
  - Role play script A & Applying DO IT!
  - Role play script B & Applying DO IT!
- Session 8: Steps 1 & 2 of DO IT!
- Session 9: Steps 3 & 4 of DO IT!
- Session 10: Using DO IT!
- Session 11: Real life stories to use DO IT!
- Session 12: Giving informed consent

Section 3: How to Get What You Need, Sec. 101
- Session 13: Community resources in your plan
- Session 14: Community resources for work
- Session 15: Community resources for more school
- Session 16: Community resources for living
- Session 17: Community resources for fun
- Session 18: Community resources you want

Section 4: Goals, Objectives, and the Future
- Session 19: Identifying goals in your plan
- Session 20: Identifying goals for work
- Session 21: Identifying goals for more school
- Session 22: Identifying goals for living
- Session 23: Identifying goals for fun
- Session 24: Keeping track of your goals

Section 5: Communicating (or: I thought you said she said he said?)

- Session 25: Communicating in small groups
- Session 26: Body language and assertiveness
- Session 27: Advocating and appealing
- Session 28: Timing and persuasion
- Session 29: Keeping your ideas out there
- Session 30: Listening and the team

Section 6: Thank You, Honorable Chairperson

- Session 31: Different kinds of meetings
- Session 32: Step to planning a meeting
- Session 33: Being a good team member
- Session 34: Managing the meeting
- Session 35: Sessions 1-18 review
- Session 36: Sessions 19-34 review